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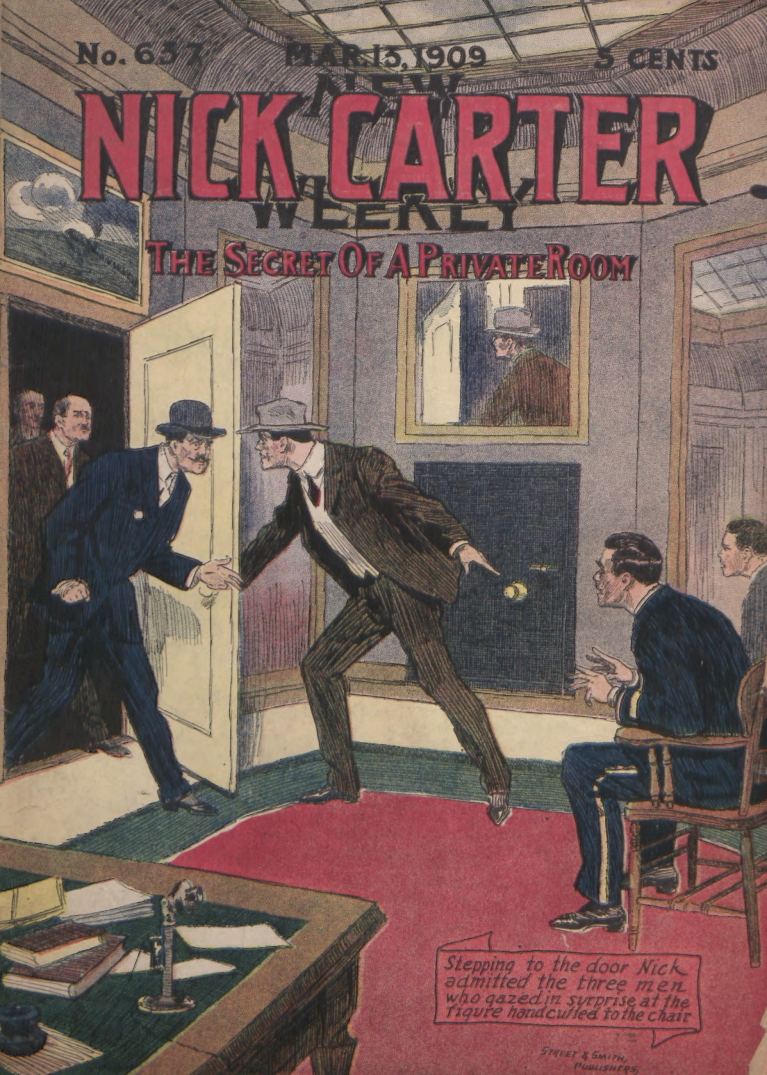
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE SECRET OF A PRIVATE ROOM



Stepping to the door Nick admitted the three men who gazed in surprise at the figure handcuffed to the chair

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The Secret of a Private Room

OR,

NICK CARTER MAKES AN EXPERIMENT.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A REMARKABLE CRIME.

Joseph ascended to Nick Carter's study one Sunday afternoon shortly after three o'clock, and, after having tapped lightly upon the door, announced, as he placed a card on the table beside the detective:

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

The detective turned his eyes upon the card and read the name: "Mr. Algernon Snowdon;" and, after apparently studying it for a moment, he asked without turning his head:

"Well, Joseph, what are the particulars?"

"Nothing of any consequence, sir. Mr. Snowdon appears to be a gentleman, and has something of a foreign air about him, I should say."

"How did you arrive at that conclusion, Joseph?"

"I don't exactly know, sir, save that it is the general impression I received when he walked into the library where I conducted him, and accepted the chair I proffered."

"It isn't because of any foreign accent he brought with him?" asked the detective, smiling.

"No, sir; quite the contrary; he speaks English perfectly and with no trace of an accent of any kind. However, there is something about the cut of his clothes and his general appearance and manner which would suggest that he had passed a considerable time abroad."

"A man of middle age, Joseph?"

"Yes, sir; rather under it than above it, I should say."

"Well, what more?"

"He has a high forehead and cleanly cut features, sir. He looks like an intellectual person and one of high breeding. His attire is faultless, his manners are perfect, and I should say, if I were living abroad, that he is a man of position and wealth."

"What did he have to say?"

"He asked at the door if you were at home, sir. I told him I would ascertain. He then gave me that card and did not speak again until I had conducted him into the library when he remarked as I was about to leave the room:

" 'Say to Mr. Carter that I am a total stranger to him, but that I have made this call on a matter of grave importance. Say to him, if you please, that my business is connected with the death of John Snowdon, of this city, which happened about a year ago, and, which possibly he may recall; also that I wish to discuss certain matters that have been brought about as a consequence of John Snowdon's death.'"

"Is that all, Joseph?"

"Yes, sir."

"He is in the library, you say?"

"He is."

"Tell him that I will be down in a moment."

As soon as the detective was alone he crossed the

room to a mahogany cabinet that stood in one corner of it, and, having selected a file therefrom, he turned the leaves to the letters "Sn," and presently found the name of Snowdon.

During several minutes after that he read slowly and in silence the entries made in connection with several persons of that name, among which were the John Snowdon already referred to as having been dead approximately a year, the Algernon Snowdon who was waiting in the library below stairs for the detective to go to him, one Peter Snowdon, etc., etc.

At last, evidently thoroughly conversant with all the information his files could give him, he returned that particular one to its place in the cabinet, went out of the study and descended the stairs to his waiting client.

Algernon Snowdon rose from the chair he had been occupying as the detective entered the room and bowed with all the grace and self-possession of one who was accustomed to social etiquette, and he remarked in a low and grave tone:

"I am Mr. Algernon Snowdon, Mr. Carter; the son of John Snowdon whose death about a year ago perhaps you will recall. It happened under rather peculiar circumstances and was finally adjudged an accident."

"Yes," replied the detective, "I remember it very well."

"Do you also recall the circumstances connected with my father's death?"

"I did not, sir, when your name was announced to me; but I took time before coming down to you to look through my files, and the few notes I found there brought back to my mind every particular regarding the case that was made public at the time."

"Will you tell me what those particulars are, Mr. Carter, in order that I may determine if we view the circumstances from the same standpoint?"

"I think, Mr. Snowdon," said the detective, indicating by a gesture that Snowdon was to resume his chair, and taking one that faced it, himself, "that it would be more to the point if you first informed me, in as few words as possible, to what circumstance I am indebted for your call upon me this afternoon."

"I can explain that in one sentence, Mr. Carter."

"Very well."

"My father, as you know, was a very rich man. He left behind him what would be called even in this day of great fortunes, enormous wealth."

"Yes; I have so understood it."

"My brother and I inherited, or rather were to inherit, the bulk of that fortune."

"My notes have already told me that, Mr. Snowdon."

"The residue and remainder of it was disposed of by several legacies, and chiefest among those other legatees was a half-brother of my father's who happens to be only two years older than I am, Clarence Snowdon by name."

The detective nodded his head. He had read all these facts in the notes he studied before descending to the library.

"I should say also," continued Snowdon, "that there was a letter addressed to me, as the eldest son, which my father left in charge of his attorney to be delivered after his death, which letter commanded me as the first executor under his will to do and perform certain acts as he directed them, the particulars of which I need not explain at this moment."

"Very well."

"Now, sir, to get back to the one sentence in which I said I would explain fully the reasons of my call here to-day. It is this: I think I have reason to believe that my father's death was not the result of an accident; that he was, in fact, deliberately murdered; and that following upon the commission of that crime, as a direct consequence of it, nearly two million dollars in cash and other valuable assets were stolen from the safe, located in a private room at his residence on Innwood Heights—a room in which my father spent the greater part of his time during the last several years of his life. That, sir, as nearly as I can make it so, is a succinct statement of my business with you to-day."

"Thank you," said the detective, smiling. "I can see, Mr. Snowdon, that we shall get along famously together."

"I hope so, I am sure," was the reply.

"Direct statements," continued the detective, "are invariably the best form of address between a client and his professional employee, whether the latter be a lawyer, doctor, or detective."

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Carter."

"Detail, which is, after all, never anything more then explanatory of stated facts, can always be explained as it arises; and now, sir, I believe you asked me to tell you what I recalled to mind with the aid of my notes in relation to the death of your father?"

"If you please, Mr. Carter."

"Very well; my understanding of the matter is that he was found dead in the private room you have mentioned, at or near noonday of a Sunday, following upon the reception of some company at his residence the preceding night.

"Correct."

"He was found, according to my notes, seated upon the large swivel chair he was in the habit of using at his desk; he had apparently fallen forward over his desk, or in dropping asleep had nodded his head forward violently; at least a long, slender, pointed file of steel—such a one as is used upon many office desks to puncture and hold papers temporarily—had penetrated his brain, and he had died instantly, or at least it so appeared."

"That is as I understand it," said Snowdon calmly.

"Well, need I say more?"

"No, I think not, Mr. Carter."

"My recollection," continued the detective, "is that there was no question at the time as to the cause of your father's death."

"No; there was no thought of any question about it."

"I did not visit the house at the time. I was not called upon to do so; but in addition to refreshing my memory by reference to the notes I have spoken about, I recall quite vividly the circumstance."

"Yes?"

"My recollection is that the pointed steel rod, which was affixed to a standard which rested upon his desk and was used for the temporary retention of letters and other papers, was unusually long and large, and had been used by your father, habitually, for some time."

"That is also correct."

"If I remember rightly, I was told that John Snowdon was in the habit of placing that file before him on his desk when looking through his papers, and that it was his custom to stab upon it such documents as he wished later to sort and dispose of in another manner."

"That is true."

"From the position and condition of the body when found it appeared that he had placed the pointed steel rod directly in front of him on the desk, to which he had drawn his chair closely."

"Yes, sir."

"Your father was an old man at the time of his death; past eighty, my notes tell me?"

"He was eighty-three, Mr. Carter."

"The surroundings at the time suggested that he had dropped asleep while working over his papers, or that becoming exhausted he had fainted; at all events it appeared that his head had dropped violently forward and the middle of his forehead, striking forcibly against the upturned steel point, held firmly in place by its standard, had forced the strange implement of death through his brain, killing him instantly."

"Mr. Carter, that is absolutely a correct statement of all the circumstances connected with my father's death as we have understood them up to the present time, and as they are still believed in by everybody associated with the circumstance, with the two exceptions of my brother, Peter, and myself."

"And now you say you have reason to suspect that your father was murdered?"

"I have."

"And you have waited a year before giving voice to your suspicions?"

"My suspicions were never rightly aroused until within the last six weeks."

"Am I to understand that it is your idea now that some person or persons forced that steel rod into your father's brain, or plunged his head down upon it while it rested on the desk, with malice prepense, and with the desire to kill?"

"That is precisely my idea, Mr. Carter."

"And which view of the circumstances do you take?"

"The latter."

"Why?"

"Because I am inclined to believe that my father was killed by a person who was entirely familiar with his habits; by a person who would be admitted to that private room of my father's without question; by a person for whom my father would have thought a nod of recognition was sufficient greeting, and for whom he would not have considered it necessary to leave his chair; by a person who could step up beside him while he was seated at his desk and who could without attracting notice to his intention seize upon an excellent opportunity to commit the crime."

"And you have such a person in your mind at the present moment, Mr. Snowdon?"

"I have."

"Are you prepared to give that person a name?"

"I am."

"What is that name?"

"It is the name of my father's half-brother, Clarence Snowdon."

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERIOUS SAFE-ROBBERY.

"Will you relate to me, Mr. Snowdon, what the circumstances are which have brought you to so positive a conclusion?"

"They are many, Mr. Carter."

"Will you relate them?"

"Certainly; but in order to do so understandingly, I must enter upon considerable detail."

"Very good, Mr. Snowdon. The time for detail has arrived."

"It is necessary first that I should give you a short résumé of family history."

"Well?"

"My father was an only child by my grandfather's first marriage, but after the old gentleman had remained a widower for many years he married again, a woman who died in giving birth to my half-uncle, Clarence Snowdon. For some reason that I know nothing about, my grandfather was never fond of his second son, who was born only two years prior to the time of my own birth. When my grandfather died he left the bulk of his fortune to my father, settling only a large annuity upon his second son, Clarence. The latter has always lived rather a fast life, has spent much of his time abroad, and has never been on affectionate or even familiar terms with the family. Indeed, Mr. Carter, it was rarely that he appeared among us at all save to make demands upon my father for funds. I know that they quarreled frequently, and, in fact, that they rarely met without having a misunderstanding, and that they never parted after a meeting without actually quarreling. So much for the family history."

"Well?" said the detective.

"Clarence Snowdon was living in New York at the time of my father's death."

"Were you not, also?"

"No, I was living abroad; in Paris; I have made Paris my home for many years."

"And your brother Peter, also?"

"Peter was a part of the time in Paris, but more at home in London."

"So that you are both in a measure expatriates; is that the idea?"

"Yes, Mr. Carter."

"Well, go on with your story."

"Clarence Snowdon had been living in New York about a year at the time of my father's death. I know that it was his habit to call upon the governor, as Peter and I invariably addressed him, at least once a month, and sometimes more frequently."

"Well?"

"He had induced my father to advance a considerable sum of money, amounting almost to a million dollars, in some project of his which failed, and the consequence of it was that an added bitterness sprang up between them. At the time of my father's death there was a condition of coldness existing between them which amounted almost to an open quarrel."

"Go on, Mr. Snowdon."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Carter, it did not occur to me to question the cause of my father's death, or to suspect that it had not been correctly explained, until six weeks ago, when in carrying out the conditions of the letter I have already referred to, as left by my father in the care of his attorney, my brother, Peter, and I, accompanied by Clarence Snowdon, visited the huge safe in my father's private room at his residence, to open it."

"Do you mean that the safe had not been opened until that time since your father's death?"

"Yes."

"Why was that?"

"It was explicitly so directed in my father's letter."

"You mean that it was explicitly directed that the safe should be opened on a certain specified date?"

"No; not upon a certain date; but at a certain time, depending upon the carrying out of conditions that were made in the letter."

"Have you that letter with you?"

"I have a copy of it, yes."

"I will ask you to produce it presently; just now you may go ahead with your statement."

"In accordance with the conditions laid down in the letter, my brother, Peter, and myself, with Clarence Snowdon and Mortimer Green, who is at the head of the firm of lawyers I have mentioned, met in that private room of my father's, to open the safe. It was impossible that the safe could be opened unless we four were present in each other's company to do so."

"How's that, Mr. Snowdon? I do not understand."

"First, then, let me explain to you that the safe itself is one of the old-fashioned Herring patterns."

"Yes."

"It is an enormous affair, built into walls of my father's residence, imbedded in cement and surrounded by it, save, of course, at the front where the door of it opened into the room."

"I understand."

"The safe was built under the personal direction of my grandfather, and after his death was supplied with new doors by my father. The dial of the safe is a complicated affair—or was so considered at the time it was manufactured—and four separate numbers are required to be used to open it."

"That is not uncommon now, Mr. Snowdon."

"I am aware of that fact; but the point is this, Mr. Carter."

"Well?"

"The four persons I have named, myself and my brother, Peter, Clarence Snowdon and Mortimer Green, were all appointed executors under my father's will."

"Yes."

"At different times my father gave each one of us four, specific and personal directions and instructions about the opening of the safe."

"You will have to be more explicit, Mr. Snowdon."

"What I mean is this: My father first sent for Mr. Green and to him made a statement like this: 'Mr. Green, when after my death you are called upon to be present at the opening of that safe which stands in the corner of my room, your duty will be to work the dial first. In doing so you will turn it three or more times completely around to the right, at last pausing at the figure seventy-seven. Please remember that, three or more times completely around to the right, stopping at seventy-seven.'"

"And then——"

"Next, Mr. Carter, you may consider my father as having sent for Clarence Snowdon, and to him making a statement somewhat as follows: 'Clarence, when you are called upon to be present at the opening of that safe after I am dead, your duty will be to seize upon the dial when you are directed to do so by my son, Algernon, and you will turn it twice completely around to the left and continue on the third turn until you arrive at forty-three, there you will stop. Remember, twice completely around to the left and continue on the third turn until you come to forty-three, then stop.'"

"I am beginning to understand you," said the detective.

"Next," said Mr. Snowdon, "my brother, Peter, received his directions in which he was instructed in the same manner, to attack the dial when told to do so by me, and it was his duty to turn the dial twice completely around to the right and continue on the third turn to the right until he arrived at the number thirty-seven."

The detective nodded.

"My instructions—my personal instructions regarding the opening of the safe, Mr. Carter, I never received until the letter I have already referred to several times, was placed in my hands by my father's attorneys."

"The reason for that is obvious," said Nick.

"Quite so, I think."

"You were not to know—in fact, no one was to know, what the last number of the combination might be until after your father's death?"

"That is correct."

"And while trusting you more than any of the others, he really appeared to trust you less."

"So it would seem."

"Go on, Mr. Snowdon."

"Upon opening the letter and reading its contents I discovered there, among other directions, this one: I was to summon the three other members of the quartet as I have named them, and we were to get together at any time most convenient for us to do so. We were to meet in the private room of my father—the room where he died—and I was to direct Green to move the dial of the safe as he had been instructed to do by my father; next I was to direct Clarence Snowdon to do likewise; Peter came next, and after the three had fulfilled their obligations concerning the dial I was to move it once completely around to the left, and, beginning upon the second circuit of the dial, was to stop at seventy-four, after which my directions as contained in the letter were of course that I should turn the dial again to the right until it stopped, when the tumblers would have fallen into place, and the safe would be unlocked. In the event of the failure of the lock to act, due to any mistake one of us might have made in the operation, the effort was to be repeated. That, Mr. Carter, is all that the letter contained which directly concerned the opening of the safe door."

"I understand, Mr. Snowdon."

"At the time of my father's death, my brother, Peter, was traveling somewhere through the interior of Africa, on a hunting expedition, and it was not until a few months ago that I was able to locate him, at which time he received the first information of his father's death, and of the duties that were expected of him."

"I suppose that was why you were so long in getting together to open the safe," said Nick.

"Yes, that was one reason. I was myself ill at the time of my father's death, and more than two months elapsed before I could come to this country. In the meantime, Clarence Snowdon had temporarily disappeared. In fact, you will see, Mr. Carter, that the entire adjustment of my father's estate as directed in his letter, was necessarily delayed."

"Yes."

"This fact did not materially effect me or my brother. It was rather hard upon some of the legatees, but we have no concern with them at the present time."

"No."

"I think the delay had more direct effect upon Clarence Snowdon than any other person, because I have no doubt that he was very much in need of his legacy. I have never known him when he was not in need of money."

"But all that," said the detective, "the delay, the reasons for it, and its consequences, have nothing to do with the direct reason for your call here to-day, have they?"

"Not at all."

"Then, will you be good enough to get down to that?"

"I am coming to it, Mr. Carter."

"And I am waiting," said Nick, smiling.

"My father's will directed that a majority of the executors under it might at any time when they get together, adjust the affairs of the estate without recourse to the fourth executor, although it specified that the testator would prefer that the four should act together."

"Well?" said Nick.

"The consequence of that clause, Mr. Carter, was that all the preliminary directions of the will were carried out by Clarence Snowdon, Mortimer Green, and myself before the return of my brother from Africa. You see, I was perfectly confident of my ability to act for Peter, and of his acquiescence in whatever I should do."

"Yes."

"So now you understand how it was that while many of the provisions of the will were carried out, there was one—and I now refer to the clause which directed the fulfilment of the conditions laid down in this letter—which was necessarily deferred until my brother should arrive back here from Africa, and we four could be together at the opening of the safe door."

"I understand," said Nick; "but it strikes me that your father took long chances in the disposition of those combination numbers."

"Perhaps so."

"Has it occurred to you, Mr. Snowdon, that if your brother had been killed in Africa, one of the numbers of the combination would have been lost?"

"Yes."

"Or if any of you four had died suddenly the result would have been the same?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps your father made other arrangements about the discovery of those numbers in case one or more was lost?"

"I don't know as to that, Mr. Carter; it does not concern us now."

"No."

"What does concern us, Mr. Carter, is the fact that notwithstanding the precaution my father took before his death in regard to the opening of that safe, after he should have ceased to live, it had nevertheless been opened and rifled of its contents, some time between the hour of his death and the occasion when we four met together to open it."

CHAPTER III.

A LOOTED SAFE.

There was silence for a considerable space between the two men after this last extraordinary statement made by Algernon Snowdon, and it was broken by the latter; and presently he asked:

"Now, Mr. Carter, don't you think it would be

well to read the copy of the letter my father left with his lawyers for me?"

"Yes," replied Nick; and the letter was placed in his hands. He read as follows:

"To my son Algernon Snowdon:

"MY DEAR ALGERNON: I will make this letter of directions to you as brief as possible, it being my desire merely to tell you what course to adopt in relation to a few particular matters which I do not care explicitly to explain in my last will and testament. I have disposed of my property according to my desires, and, I think, with justice to all concerned. I am fully confident that neither you nor your brother, Peter, will take any exceptions to what I have therein directed; but, in addition, it is my duty to inform you that it has been my habit for many years to keep locked inside the safe in this room where I am writing, a sufficient supply of cash to meet any emergencies which might arise in these trying times of business. That amount in cash is never less than one million dollars, and at the present time as I write, it amounts approximately to two millions and may be somewhat more or less than that last amount when it becomes your duty to read these words. In addition to the cash I have named, there is other personal negotiable property contained in the safe which I need not particularly specify, more than to say that the total of cash and negotiable bonds referred to will amount to the approximate sum of five million dollars. This total is to become, when you shall open the safe, the absolute property of yourself and your brother, Peter, to divide equally between you after two thousand dollars of the amount in cash has been taken therefrom, one thousand of which is to be paid to Mortimer Green, and the other thousand is to be paid to my half-brother, Clarence, as recompense for their attendance here in assisting you to open the safe as I shall hereafter direct.

"Inside the inner receptacle of the safe, which is known as the cash-box, in the lower of the two left-hand drawers therein contained, you will find a linen envelope sealed with wax with the impression of the ring I wear upon the third finger of my left hand, addressed to you. This envelope you will not open until it has been in your personal possession at least twenty-four hours, and you will only break the seal of it when you are absolutely alone. Having broken the seal and opened it, you will follow explicitly the directions you will find written upon the outside of a second envelope contained within it.

"In my will, as you must have discovered before you read this, I have amply provided for my half-brother, Clarence, and I have deemed it wise to provide him with an annuity rather than a stated sum, because I know that if I followed the latter course he would presently be a pauper, and would become a constant annoyance to you with his demands for money. I charge you, therefore, to advance him no funds whatever after my death, inasmuch as I consider the large annuity I have left him should be more than sufficient for his needs; and as it is to be paid to him quarterly, he need never, for a protracted period, be without funds.

"In giving directions about the opening of this safe I have thought it best to follow out the course I have adopted. When you four shall have gathered together for the purpose of opening it, it will become your duty to take charge of the proceedings, and in doing so you will first direct Mr. Green to carry out his instructions received from me. That done, you will give Clarence the same directions. That accomplished, it will become Peter's turn; and when all three have acted, then you shall take your turn at the dial as follows: You will turn it once completely around to the left, continuing on the second turn until you arrive at the figure 74, then stop and turn the dial to the right until it stops, the safe will then be ready to open.

"This, my son, concludes all the directions I deem necessary to give you here, and I add only the injunction that you will carefully fulfil the directions contained in the sealed envelope aforesaid, and whatever further directions I may hereafter conclude to leave for your perusal; and in the latter case, such will be found inside the drawer of the cash-box before referred to.

Fondly, your father,

"JOHN SNOWDON."

The detective read the letter through to the end twice, before refolding it and returning it to its owner.

"It is at least a simple and straightforward document," he said, by way of comment.

"My father was chiefly remarkable for his directness in all things he undertook," said Snowdon.

"I imagine so," replied the detective; "and now, Mr. Snowdon, if you please, I would like to have you describe to me in detail just what occurred at the ceremony of the opening of the safe."

"Do you mean at the opening of the safe itself, or also in the arrangements which led up to it?"

"I mean that I wish to know just what occurred in that room where the safe is located; at the time you and the others met there for the purpose of opening it."

"Very well, Mr. Carter."

"Go ahead, please."

"The appointment was made for a Sunday afternoon. We four were to dine together at my father's house, and, after dining, were to repair to his private room, which he always referred to as his office, where without more delay we were to proceed with the opening of the safe."

"Yes."

"I carried out the directions you have read in that letter exactly as my father wished me to do."

"Tell me just what you did."

"I arranged three chairs nearly in the center of the room facing the safe. I asked my brother, my half-uncle, and Mr. Green, to occupy those chairs. I then called upon Mr. Green to carry out his instructions. He did so, and I then directed Clarence Snow-

don to do the same. Peter followed Clarence Snowdon, and when my turn came I acted upon it. That is all, I believe."

"Did the tumblers of the combination-lock work at the first trial?"

"They did."

"There was no difficulty experienced in opening the safe?"

"None whatever."

"Is there not an inside door to that safe?"

"Yes."

"How is that inside door unlocked?"

"By the use of a key."

"Where was that key?"

"It was in the lock of the inside door."

"Did you know of the existence of such a key and of the fact that there was an inside door which locked with one?"

"I did."

"Did it not occur to you that there might be some difficulty in getting inside the safe even after the combination-lock had been properly adjusted?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because of my familiarity with my father's methodical habits."

"I don't think I understand you, Mr. Snowdon."

"I knew that my father would have left nothing undone to accomplish what he had set out to do, and that having given such explicit directions he would have placed no obstacle in my way."

"You expected, then, to find the key within the lock of the inside door?"

"Frankly, I did."

"Was it your father's habit to leave that key in that place?"

"I cannot say as to that."

"However, the key was there when the outside door was opened, as I understand you?"

"It was."

"Who proceeded with the opening of the safe?"

"I did."

"The letter, by its terms, in effect appointed you master of ceremonies for the occasion, did it not?"

"I so understood it; and the others as well."

"You then turned the key of the inside door, unlocked it and threw it open, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Proceed now from that point."

"There is nothing more to say, Mr. Carter."

"Why so?"

"Because where I had expected to find a considerable accumulation of documents, papers, possibly stock-certificates and bonds as well, and also some books of accounts, I discovered only the last-named articles."

"You mean only the books of accounts, I suppose?"

"Yes; but even those had been mutilated."

"Mutilated? How?"

"The leaves inside the books in which the accounts had been kept, were missing. They had been torn from the books and disposed of. Only blank pages were left inside the covers, and in many cases more than half of the number of leaves in the book had been destroyed, or at least had disappeared."

"When did you discover that fact? At once?"

"No; later."

"How much later?"

"After I had proceeded with the examination of the interior of the safe."

"In what manner did you proceed?"

"Well, Mr. Carter, my impression was that my father had purposely cleared the safe of much of its former contents. It did not occur to me at the time that other hands than his had been at work there. I supposed that everything I found was part and parcel with this prearrangement, and I therefore at once proceeded to open the compartment inside the safe which he had named the cash-box."

"Describe that compartment, Mr. Snowdon."

"It is the same sort of compartment that you will find located in about the center of the interior of any Herring safe of that pattern. I should say that it is two feet square by eighteen inches deep inside it. The upper half of its interior is an open space which I know formerly to have contained four square tin boxes, which exactly fitted into it. The lower half is composed of a double set of drawers, two on either side."

"Well, what did you find when you opened the cash-box?"

"Nothing."

"What? Nothing at all?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"Do you mean that even the four tin boxes you have described were not there?"

"There was nothing there."

"And the sealed envelope in one of the drawers addressed to you, as your father described it?"

"It was not to be found."

"The safe contained nothing of value?"

"The safe contained nothing save the bindings of the books I have described and the few blank pages which the desecrater of the safe had thought it unnecessary to destroy."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE DEATH.

"What was the effect of this discovery upon each of the three persons who were with you at that time, considering each one separately?" asked the detective, after several moments of silence.

"Surprise," replied Snowdon. "I think that is the only word by which I could describe it."

"But how did that surprise manifest itself in each of the three persons?"

Snowdon was silent for several moments before he replied, and then he said:

"I don't think, Mr. Carter, that I had considered that

point; but I do think that I can recall the scene quite perfectly now."

"Very well, do so."

"I will take them in the order in which I have already named them."

"If you please."

"I remember that Mortimer Green was leaning forward with his right arm resting upon his right knee; that he held a lighted cigar between his teeth, and that his head was half-turned to one side, so that the smoke which arose from the end of it would not smart his eyes. When I exclaimed, after opening the cash-box and the drawers inside of it, that the safe contained nothing at all, I don't think that Mr. Green moved a muscle. He remained perfectly rigid, as if he were shocked beyond the power of motion, by the information."

"Clarence Snowdon came next. What did he do?"

"He started to his feet, uttered an oath, hurled the cigar he was smoking into one corner of the room, and exclaimed: 'By heaven, the safe has been robbed!'"

The detective nodded, and smiled grimly.

"What did he do then?" he asked.

"He collapsed again upon his chair, evidently for the moment quite overcome by the discovery."

"Did you regard that as natural under the circumstances?"

"I did at the time."

"Why so? Why at that particular time?"

"Because I felt, myself, very much as he expressed himself. I was thunderstruck by the discovery I had made, and although the suggestion that the safe had been rifled did not occur to me until my half-uncle uttered it, it seemed for the moment quite plausible. I thought his consternation, his amazement, and surprise quite natural under the circumstances. And besides, Mr. Carter, there is another thing which might explain his excitement at the discovery."

"What is that?"

"I think that Clarence Snowdon had some idea that another and further legacy to himself would be found inside the safe."

"Why do you think that?"

"He has told me as much since that time."

"Has he, indeed? Now, Mr. Snowdon, what was the effect of the discovery upon you brother?"

"I should say that it was one of amused surprise."

"Why amused?"

"I think he got the impression at the time that my father had perpetrated a joke upon us."

"Was your father in the habit of perpetrating jokes?"

"Practical jokes, never; witticisms, frequently."

"This would most certainly come under the head of a practical joke," said Nick.

"I quite agree with you, sir."

"Do I understand you that you regard your father as one who was incapable of perpetrating such a joke as that circumstance would have been, had he prepared it?"

"Quite so."

"You do not, then, regard it as plausible?"

"Most emphatically I do not."

"How long a time did this apparently amused surprise of your brother, Peter, continue?"

"For a moment or two; until he realized that we were regarding it seriously, and that he was the only one present who had not jumped to the conclusion that the safe had been looted."

"What occurred immediately following upon your discovery, and upon the characteristic expressions of surprise manifested by your companions?"

Algernon Snowdon laughed with some amusement at the recollection of the incident; and he replied:

"I think for a time we merely gazed at one another in a half-stupefied manner, too greatly astounded to find adequate expression for our amazement, and too utterly dumfounded to even guess at any immediate explanation of the circumstances."

"What happened next?"

"I turned to Mr. Green and asked him if my father had made any statement to him regarding the contents of the safe, at the time he deposited the letter at the lawyer's office, or afterward."

"Had your father done so?"

"No, sir."

"What did Mr. Green say about it?"

"Merely that my father in placng the letter in his charge had made a statement that Green was to give the letter into my hands personally, as soon as convenient after my father should have died; but his instructions were explicit in that the letter should be delivered to me personally, and by him, and at his office, to which place I was to repair to secure it."

"Green was especially instructed not to take the letter to you?"

"Yes."

"And not to forward it to you?"

"Yes."

"And your father made no comment concerning the safe during that interview?"

"None at all."

"Well, after receiving that information from Green, what next?"

"I then questioned Clarence Snowdon."

"In what manner did you question him?"

"Before I reply to that question, Mr. Carter, I must remind you of the fact that it was Clarence Snowdon who was the last person to see my father alive and to talk with him."

"Yes, I had supposed that."

"I asked him, then, what was the last occasion when he had seen and talked with my father."

"What reply did he make to that?"

"He said that he had spent an hour with him in that room during the afternoon of the day preceding my father's death, and that he had also attended the

small gathering at the house that same evening, and had remained at the house overnight."

"How did you further question him?"

"Why, I asked him what had passed between them, and if my father had made any remarks which concerned the safe, directly or indirectly; and to the latter question he replied in the negative; he stated positively that my father had not once mentioned the safe."

"Not even when they were alone together in the private room of the house?"

"Apparently not."

"Did you think to ask Clarence Snowdon if the door of the safe was ajar or closed at that time?"

"No, I did not ask him that question, but he gave me the information voluntarily."

"In what manner did he give it?"

"He referred to the doors of the safe as being closed and apparently locked."

"Why did he make that reference if you did not ask the question?"

"I don't know; I should say that it came about naturally during the course of conversation."

"What else did you ask him?"

"I am afraid I don't remember, Mr. Carter. My questions and his replies were rather general at the time, and dealt only with the last several interviews he had had with my father. I gathered as a consensus of his replies that there had been nothing out of the ordinary during this interview, and that there had been nothing in my father's conduct or in his remarks to suggest anything different from his usual habits."

"Have you anything to add to what you have already stated concerning that particular part of the episode?"

"Nothing."

"We are now down to the fact that you four gentlemen went to that house and entered that room to carry out the instructions left by John Snowdon, deceased."

"Yes."

"That upon opening the safe you found that it had been rifled of its contents and apparently there was only one possible explanation of the fact."

"Apparently, Mr. Carter, there was only one."

"Let me hear you give it in your own words, Mr. Snowdon, just as it probably occurred to you at the time."

"I don't know that I can exactly express it in words, and [illegible] with manifest hesitation.

"Why not?"

"Because it seems almost like an insult to my father."

"How so?"

"I [illegible] myself how I was going to [illegible] this solution, and [illegible] of considering himself in a manner to accept the most apparent possible explanation of the circumstances."

"Something, give it to me."

"Why, I think I told myself at the time that one of two things had happened; that my father, not at all expecting to die so violently, or so soon, had removed the contents of the safe himself, intending to make some change concerning them, and had not had time to do so; or—here is where I fall down, Mr. Carter—he had changed his mind entirely concerning the safe, and had purposely stripped it."

"The thought of a joke on his part did not enter your mind?"

"No, sir."

"And does not do so now?"

"Positively not."

"You did not then seriously consider the thought of robbery?"

"No."

"Not even when it was suggested by your uncle?"

"The suggestion found a lodgment in my reason, but I don't think it had any appreciable effect upon me at the time."

"When did you first seriously consider the suggestion of robbery?"

"Not for a long time afterward."

"And what led you seriously to consider it?"

"Many things did so, Mr. Carter; not any particular one taken by itself, but several taken together."

"Well, what were they; and what are they?"

"First, the sudden jumping at the conclusion of robbery on the part of my half-uncle at the time of the discovery of the empty safe."

"Yes."

"Second, the entire improbability that my father would have failed in any particular to carry out the specifications he had made for himself and me."

"Yes."

"Third, my perfect knowledge of my father's character and habits, and of his methodical way of doing things."

"Yes."

"Fourth, the conduct of my uncle since that time."

"We will refer to that again later. What is the fifth?"

"Fifth, the fact that my uncle has been extraordinarily flush with funds ever since the death of my father, and even before he received the first instalment of his annuity, under the will."

"That is something. What next?"

"Sixth—and this is an important count, Mr. Carter."

"Very well, what is it?"

"The manner of my father's death."

"We have already touched upon that."

"Yes; but not very emphatically."

"No. What do you wish to say about the manner of his death?"

"Mr. Carter, my father was killed by his head becoming impaled upon a pointed steel file standing upright on the desk in front of him. In order to have become impaled, his head must have fallen forward or have been pushed down upon the implement."

"Yes; we have already discussed that."

"Not quite as I wish to discuss it, Mr. Carter."

"Well, go on."

"If my father fell forward upon that steel rod it must have been the result of sudden illness; sudden faintness, sudden death happening immediately before the rod penetrated his brain, or of drowsiness."

"Yes."

"My father was an extraordinarily robust and healthy man. It was his habit to boast that he had never paid a doctor's bill in his life, for services to himself. Constitutionally, there was absolutely nothing the matter with him, and never had been, to my certain knowledge."

"Wait; how long a time had passed before his death since you had seen him personally?"

"Six months almost to a day."

"Go on."

"The old gentleman was always unusually alert; he was never drowsy, particularly in the daytime. I have never in all my life known him to fall asleep in a chair. He was a man of absolute abstemiousness, and never used liquor or drugs in any form."

"Well?"

"The result of all this is, Mr. Carter, that I have come to the deliberate conclusion that my father was killed by having his head forced down upon that steel rod so that it impaled his brain."

CHAPTER V.

THE FIVE HUMAN SENSES.

"What do you know about the combination of that safe?" asked the detective.

"I don't think I understand your question," replied Snowdon. "I have already told you all that I know about the combination."

"Who, besides your father, during his life, knew that combination?"

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"I am positive of it."

"Why are you so positive?"

"Because it was a hobby of his never to let any one know the combination of his safe."

"But you know that he has always practised that [illegible]

"[illegible] had never broken [illegible]

"[illegible] to my [illegible] knowledge."

"Then I am to understand that [illegible] and [illegible] about first arranging for a [illegible] combination [illegible] the safe [illegible] and [illegible] a [illegible] without [illegible] [illegible]

"[illegible]

"[illegible] [illegible] [illegible]?"

"[illegible] have [illegible] [illegible]

"Yes; he even gloated over it."

"Apparently, then, he stood in no fear of sudden death?"

"None whatever, I think."

"How long a time is it since he first made the arrangement with you four gentlemen for the ultimate opening of the safe?"

"About four years."

"Up to that time the secret of the combination had remained only with himself?"

"Yes."

"Did you, personally, ever have any previous knowledge of what that safe contained?"

"No."

"None at all?"

"I knew that it contained a considerable amount of cash and some securities; nothing more."

"Just now, I suppose, you are quite confident that the secret of the combination was not in the possession of any other person at the time of your father's death."

"I am."

"And that the only knowledge of it that existed was the united knowledge of you four who assisted at its ultimate opening."

"Yes."

"When you four went to that room to open the safe, was there any appearance about the place that indicated disturbance?"

"None at all."

"Did you notice particularly?"

"I did not; but I would have noticed had there been such disturbances."

"And yet you now believe that the safe was opened and looted?"

"I do."

"By some person who knew the combination?"

"Yes."

"Do you not appreciate that you are now stating a practical impossibility, Mr. Snowdon?"

"Viewed from one standpoint, I am."

"You begin by making the assertion that no one knew that combination besides your father, and you close with the statement that the safe was nevertheless opened by some person who understood the combination."

Mr. Snowdon shifted one leg over his knee and replied with methodical precision:

"Mr. Carter, I have discussed that seeming impossibility in my mind almost continually since the happening of that event. I have endeavored in every way possible to account for it. It stands to reason, does it not, Mr. Carter, that my father's safe could not have been opened without the combination? Wait; don't answer me; let me finish. We understand that no person did know that combination. It was known to the four of us who finally opened the safe after it had been looted, but it was only understood after we got together and [illegible] [illegible] from me as outlined in my father's letter."

"Well?" said the detective, smiling.

"I have heard somewhere, or I have read it, I am not sure which, that there are people in the world so expert in the manipulation of combination locks that they find it possible by placing the ear close to the dial of such a lock, to discover a combination merely by sounds which are almost inaudible save to such practised and expert hearing. Now, it has occurred to me, assuming that my suspicions are correct and that my father's half-brother is the guilty party, that he may be one of those experts."

"I consider it extremely unlikely," remarked the detective.

"Again, Mr. Carter, there is the bare possibility, although I do not regard it by any means as a probability, that my father may have made a memorandum somewhere of the combination of his safe. In that case the memorandum may have been discovered by Clarence Snowdon and made use of."

"You don't consider that likely, do you, Mr. Snowdon?"

"No; emphatically I do not."

"Tell me how you think your father would have remembered the combination if you don't think he would have made a memorandum of it?"

"Very simply; he would have memorized it."

"Well, have you thought of any other means whereby Clarence Snowdon or another such person as he, might have acquired information regarding the combination of the safe?"

"I have thought of one, Mr. Carter, but it seems to me to be even more improbable than the others."

"What is it?"

"It is that my uncle or some other person has managed by some means which we cannot now explain, to observe my father and watch him closely when he was turning the dial of the safe, preparatory to opening it. You see, Mr. Carter, we must not forget that notwithstanding the coolness which existed between my father and his half-brother, the latter was always freely admitted to the house, and to my father's presence; and it has occurred to me as possible, although no less improbable than the other ideas I have advanced, that he may, at some time have managed to conceal himself here, and so observe the opening of the safe and to remember the combination."

"That is going a long way to account for a mystery," said the detective.

"Unquestionably it is, and yet we are confronted by an apparent impossibility; we are in the position of being compelled to explain the happening of an event that was impossible from the beginning."

"Nothing is impossible, Mr. Snowdon," smiled the detective. "If we look at this matter in its logical light, if we accept the theory that the safe was opened and looted by a person who had acquired knowledge of the combination, we must start with the hypothesis that your father somehow revealed the secret of it. In some way could it have become known. We must, therefore, driven back to the point of beginning, and we find ourselves compelled to search for the method by which that secret was betrayed. We must view it first from the standpoint of the man who had the secret to conceal—your father. After we have exhausted that resource, we must view it from the standpoint of the man who wished to discover the secret—your uncle."

"Yes, sir," said Snowdon.

"I assume from the description you have given me of your father, and of his habits and methods, that he was an unusually self-centered man, perfectly master of his conduct and methods, and not at all inclined to deviate from them for any ordinary reason."

"You may assume that as a fact."

"He has boasted to you that the combination of his safe in which he kept a large amount of property in cash and securities, was known only to himself, and that he had made no memorandum of it which it would be possible for another to find."

"That is true."

"The only memorandum that ever was made of it was the one which enabled you four persons to work the tumblers of the lock after his death, and without your personal assistance the other three would have found it as impossible to open the safe as if they had no knowledge about it whatever."

"That is also true."

"Even had there been unity of action between the lawyer and your uncle and had they gone there together possessing knowledge of only two of the numbers, they would have been helpless without your brother and yourself."

"Correct."

"Had they induced your brother to accompany them, and had the three visited the safe they would have been helpless still without you."

"Entirely so, as I view the matter."

"That, I think, disposes of half of our difficulty. I mean by that statement that your father did not knowingly, by any act of his, reveal the combination."

"I think we may assume that as true, sir."

"Now, Mr. Snowdon, that boils down the entire inquiry to the one question to which we must find an answer, and that question is: What means did Clarence Snowdon employ—assuming for the sake of the argument that Clarence Snowdon is the guilty party—to secure possession of a secret held by your father alone, concerning which he had never spoken and had never made a written memoranda?"

Snowdon shrugged his shoulders, leaned back in his chair, and crossed his legs again.

"An unanswerable question," he remarked; "and, Mr. Carter, it is the same snag with which I have collided every time I have propounded these queries to myself. It is unanswerable."

"No," replied the detective, "there is an answer."

"And do you think that you can find it?"

"Without finding it, Mr. Snowdon, we will never draw any nearer to the solution of the mystery than we are at the present moment."

"But how will you proceed in order to find it?"

"Mr. Snowdon, science tells us that we are possessed of five senses—hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and touching. We are agreed that the first one mentioned, hearing, was not the method employed in this case, because in order to accept that theory we must admit that Clarence Snowdon is an expert with combination lock-tumblers, and I do not admit that."

"Well?"

"The senses of smelling, tasting and touching are alike wholly inadequate in a case of this kind."

"I grant you that."

"We are reduced, therefore, to an investigation of the only human sense that remains to have revealed this secret to the prospective thief."

"Yes."

"We must, therefore, assume, before we proceed on this investigation, that Clarence Snowdon, if he be the man, *saw* your father work that combination and *learned it by that means.*"

"Yes; but——"

"Mr. Snowdon, I will now ask you, without further argument upon this matter, to take me to that private room in your father's residence and to let me study the safe itself and its surroundings."

CHAPTER VI.

JOHN SNOWDON'S PRIVATE OFFICE.

The room into which Nick Carter was conducted after their arrival at the mansion where old John Snowdon and his father before him had lived while [illegible] was found in a part of the building which might have been called a [illegible] but which was in reality more like a separate [illegible].

It was located at the south side of the mansion and was octagonal in form, one of the planes of the octant [illegible] against the mansion itself, wherein a passage-way was constructed between the two buildings, for we must regard them separately.

This left seven of the planes of the octant free from contact with the building. The room contained no windows whatever of an ordinary description since each one of the octants described was of solid masonry from the floor to the beginning of the dome; but light was admitted to this strange apartment through [illegible] in the dome. So there was the [illegible] of which these windows were composed that very little daylight was ever admitted to that room, and Snowdon explained to Nick that the electric lights were [illegible] in the [illegible] so that [illegible] the [illegible] might be [illegible] [illegible].

The [illegible] was constructed of a wrought-iron [illegible] into which the [illegible]-shaped panes of [illegible] had been [illegible], and not one of these [illegible] openings was large enough to have admitted the passage of a half-grown boy, even had the glass with its bedding of cement been absent.

Curtains which worked upon pulleys from inside the room shaded whatever light could penetrate this glass when the occupant so desired. Ventilation was had by means of another rope upon pulleys which opened or closed iron shutters at the top of the dome at the will of the occupant of the same.

The office, as the old man had called it, was twenty-two feet in diameter. The only entrance was through that passageway already described, which was protected by a ponderous and heavy door provided with an intricate lock. A single glance told the detective that this extension of the mansion had been constructed upon a well conceived plan to render it fireproof and burglar-proof and, without being told, he had no doubt that the walls of solid masonry descended deeply into the ground on every side.

The safe about which so much has been said was at that plane of the octant at the south side of the room, and had been built into the wall. A large, heavily-constructed library table occupied the center of the room, and had always been used by John Snowdon as a desk; and when seated at this desk his position was such that the safe door was directly behind him.

A thick, heavy rug, evidently made to order for that particular apartment, and now much worn by many years of constant use, covered the floor. A revolving bookcase stood at one side of the chair which the millionaire had always occupied when engaged at his desk. Other books of reference were piled systematically upon a table. There was a couch and several comfortable chairs, paintings and engravings and the usual accessories to such a place to make up the remainder of its furnishings.

But the fact remained that when John Snowdon occupied that room and was seated at his desk engaged with his papers his position was such that his back was toward the safe, and he was exactly facing the door which communicated between that apartment and the house proper.

It will be seen by this statement that no person could have entered the room without John Snowdon's knowledge, and since he guarded so carefully the secret of the combination of his safe, it is to be assumed that he would never have worked that combination save when he was alone.

As Nick Carter passed into the room, followed by Snowdon, the appearance of it was as it might always have been during the life of the millionaire, and Algernon Snowdon assured the detective that the place looked exactly as it had always appeared during the lifetime of his father.

As the detective came to a stop just inside the door [illegible] the surroundings, Snowdon stepped forward and placed himself in his father's chair, then, bending forward and bowing his head over the desk, he indicated with one hand the position of the steel paper-file and showed the detective, just as it had formerly been described to him, the exact position in which his father

had been found. But the detective paid very little attention to what Snowdon was doing at the time. He was studying the room, and doing so with the same attention to detail which he always devoted to such a place under like circumstances.

"Remain just where you are, Snowdon, for the present," he said, "and do me the favor not to speak to me at all until I question you."

He then passed behind his client and began that slow pivotal turning which we have seen him practise before when studying the interior of an apartment, turning his eyes from floor to ceiling slowly and methodically and gradually altering the position of his body to accommodate his vision so that inch by inch he examined every portion of the surface of the interior of that octagonal room.

Reader, if you will some time undertake to do this very thing in a room with which you are more or less familiar, and will make a mental note or even a pencilled memorandum of everything you discover by so doing—of everything you see at such a time which has hitherto not attracted your attention, you must be amazed by the quantity of things you will discover which you have never noticed before in that place.

Try it some time and you will quite agree with me.

Enter the parlor, or the library, or the dining-room of your own house, or even the bedroom where you are accustomed to pass every night of your life; stand in the middle of the floor and begin at the northeast corner, raise your eyes slowly until your glance arrives at a point in the ceiling directly over your head; cast your vision back again by the same slow method, following a line an inch or two to the right of where you have looked before until your gaze is again upon the floor at your feet; send your glance aloft again another inch or two toward the right and continue this operation until you have made the entire circuit of the room and arrived again at the point of beginning. Make a note of everything you discover which you have hitherto failed to notice, even if it is so small a thing as a fly-speck or a bit of cobweb clinging anywhere that you have never seen before. You will be amazed by the long list that will be the result of it.

We have suggested this in detail here in order to [illegible] you the [illegible] with which Nick Carter always were about an investigation of this kind.

He would, indeed, [illegible] an attentive memorizing of [illegible] and things connected with his surroundings, [illegible] the aid of written memoranda, for he made [illegible] note of only those things which would be available in his investigations.

The present occupation, you will readily understand by this description, occupied a long time, and from the moment when he stepped behind the chair of Algernon Snowdon to begin it until, somewhat exhausted by his mental effort, he passed to the other side of the flat-top desk and dropped upon a chair, almost an hour had passed.

Now, as he seated himself, he was facing the door of the safe, and Snowdon, watching him, saw that the detective's eyes were still traveling up and down, evidently from the dial of the combination lock to the domelike roof of that strange apartment which had been John Snowdon's office for so many years.

"Snowdon," said the detective presently, "when you four were here together for the opening of the safe and after you made the discovery that it contained nothing of value, what was done?"

"Nothing at all."

"But the safe is now closed," said the detective.

"Yes."

"Who closed it?"

"I did."

"Then? At that time?"

"Yes."

"And did you throw the dial around so that it was relocked when you closed it?"

"Yes."

"Has it been opened again since that time?"

"No."

"Are you positive about that?"

"Yes; that is, I am as positive as I could be without having remained in this room to watch it. The only persons who could have opened it since then are the four who were here at that time. Not one of them would have had any interest in doing so, since we jointly knew that there was not so much as the value of a pin remaining inside the safe."

"I think I will open it," said the detective.

"Why?"

The detective did not answer, but he left his chair and crossed the room to the safe door, pulling forward a stool which was at one side and near at hand, evidently kept there for the very use which Nick Carter made of it—that of affording a seat in front of the safe during the manipulation of the dial.

[illegible] he had [illegible] combination full once. He experienced no difficulty in remembering them. Three times to the right and around to 77, twice to the left and around to 43, twice to the right and around to 37, once to the left and around to 74, and then to the right until the dial stopped.

He pushed the stool back a little way from the safe door, turned the handle and the heavy steel barriers swung open to his touch.

The interior of the safe presented the appearance he had expected to find, but he turned to Algernon Snowdon and said:

"Mr. Snowdon, before I proceed further, I wish you to come here beside me and tell me in detail exactly what you did, what next you touched, removed and returned to this safe when you opened it in the presence of your three companions."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERIOUS ENVELOPE.

The detective was seated on the stool exactly facing the open safe, peering into it; Algernon Snowdon stood a little bit behind him and to one side, slightly bent forward, also studying the interior.

If you, reader, could have peered into that room at that moment from a position which would have permitted a view of Snowdon's features you would have seen thereon an expression of the utmost amazement.

Nick Carter did not notice it, since his client was behind him; the detective was silent and expectant, waiting for some statement or comment from Snowdon in reply to his last request, and he did not know—could not know, since his back was toward Snowdon—that the latter had been rendered almost speechless with astonishment by some discovery that was revealed to him in his first glance through the open safe doors.

But the silence continued so long a time that the detective presently, with some impatience, exclaimed:

"Well, Snowdon, why don't you answer me?"

"Mr. Carter," came the reply in a husky tone filled with suppressed emotion, "I think for the moment I was [illegible]."

"Why so?"

"The safe has been visited since I closed it."

"What!" exclaimed the detective, now deeply interested, and half-wheeling upon the stool where he was seated.

"The safe has been opened since I have seen the inside of it," replied Snowdon, almost repeating the words he had used before.

"Do you mean that?" demanded the detective.

"I certainly do."

"How do you know it? Tell me that."

"I know it by the entire change of the position of things inside the safe since I closed the doors and locked them."

"That would indicate that the thief has been here a second time since you and the others opened it according to the directions left by your father."

"Yes."

The interior of the safe has already been sufficiently described to the reader so that a repetition is unnecessary; but now Snowdon pointed to the books he had referred to in his description and from which so many leaves had been torn away.

Instead of being in the receptacle provided for them, they were littered now at the bottom of the main compartment of the safe; were piled in an indiscriminate heap, as if they had been thrown there carelessly after a hasty inspection. The door of the cash-box was wide open. Two of the drawers inside it had been removed and were on top of the books before described.

That was all, but it was sufficient, and, pointing to them, Snowdon assured Nick that after examining the books on the occasion of the opening of the doors he had returned them to their places in their regular compartments; had returned the drawers that belonged inside the cash-box to their places and had closed the door of the cash-box itself, turning the key without removing it.

These things he explained to the detective in detail.

"I want you to be quite positive about your statement, Mr. Snowdon," said the detective, leaning back upon the stool, clasping his hands about one knee and gazing intently upon the face of his companion.

"I am, sir."

"You must remember that you were laboring under some excitement at the time; doubtless under more of it than you realized."

"I do remember."

"You were doubtless greatly shocked about the discovery you made that the safe contained absolutely nothing of value when you expected to find cash and securities to a great amount."

"Yes."

"Are you still positive about the condition in which you left the safe?"

"I am; entirely so."

"What object could the thief have who already despoiled the contents of the safe, in returning here after you made the discovery that it had been looted?"

"I have no idea. The mystery is even deeper than the other."

The detective leaned forward, picked up the two drawers and returned them to their places inside the cash-box, then he removed the top book from the pile and opened the covers, and, discovering, as he did so, that more than half of the leaves had evidently been torn out.

"Was this book in its present condition when you found it at that time?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Put it back where you replaced it after your former examination of it."

Snowdon did as directed, and the same ceremony was performed with each of the five books. There was nothing whatever that Snowdon could discover that was changed about them since his previous examination; there was nothing connected with the interior of the safe that was different from what it had been before, save as already described, and it would seem as if the original despoiler had returned to the safe for the sole purpose of mystifying future investigators.

"Are you quite confident that you examined the safe thoroughly that other time and did not overlook anything that the thief might have neglected when he robbed the safe?" asked Nick.

"I thought so then, Mr. Carter."

"Is your brother in the city at the present time?"

"Yes, he is at the Holland House."

"And the lawyer?"

"I think Mr. Green could be found at his home on Riverside Drive."

"Where is Clarence Snowdon?"

"I do not know."

"Well, Mr. Snowdon, I am going to ask you to leave me alone in this room for a time, and while you do so I wish you to communicate with your brother and Mr. Green by telephone, or otherwise, and summon them here. As you go out, I will ask you to station one of the footmen at the door of the house near that door so that he will be ready to wait upon me if I require it."

Snowdon, without a word of comment, turned away to carry out this direction, but as he was passing the threshold of the door the detective called to him:

"Wait a moment, Mr. Snowdon."

"Yes," replied the latter.

"I wish to call your attention to that paragraph of the letter of your father's left for you which referred to a linen envelope that was left in one of the drawers of this safe sealed with his signet ring and addressed to you."

"Yes."

"Read me again that paragraph of the copy of the letter you have in your pocket."

Snowdon produced the letter and read as follows:

"'Inside the inner receptacle of the safe which is known as the cash-box, in the lower of the two left-hand drawers therein contained, you will find a linen envelope sealed with wax with the impression of the ring I wear upon the third finger of my left hand, addressed to you. This envelope you will not open until it has been in your personal possession at least twenty-four hours, and you will only break the seal of it when you are absolutely alone. Having broken the seal——"

"That will do," said the detective. "Now I wish to ask you something more about that paragraph in your father's letter."

"Well, sir?"

"Have you any information at all regarding that letter to which he refers?"

"None."

"Did he ever mention such a document to you by word of mouth or in any communication he may have sent to you?"

"Never."

"Have you any idea at all concerning it?"

"No."

"Since your discovery of its loss have you not asked yourself what that envelope might have contained?"

"I have asked myself the question constantly."

"Have you found any answer to it?"

"I have not."

"Have you not even guessed at an answer?"

"No."

"But it is impossible that something has not suggested itself to you as an explanation of that mysterious envelope and its contents."

"Nothing has, Mr. Carter. I am as much in the dark as you are about it."

"Have you any idea that the contents of that envelope might have referred to other properties in your father's possession?"

"I have no ideas whatever about it."

"Do you suppose that somewhere in the world it is possible that there may be a person of whom you may never have heard, but in whom your father was nevertheless sufficiently interested to have wished to provide for her or him after his own death?"

"You can answer that question, sir, as well as I."

"May there not have been such a person whom your father did not desire to mention by name in his life?"

"There may have been."

"Do you not suspect it?"

"It is a possible explanation, but I have not suspected it until you just now suggested it."

"Has it occurred to you, Mr. Snowdon, that the mysterious envelope and enclosure might possibly have as much to do with the looting of this safe as the wealth it was known to contain?"

Snowdon shrugged his shoulders and, with a deprecating gesture, came two or three steps farther into the room.

"Mr. Carter," he said with slow emphasis, "I am trying to be as perfectly explicit with you as I know how to be. I am not consciously keeping back anything from you which could possibly be of aid and assistance in this investigation. My father, so far as I know, and as I thoroughly believe, led an upright, spotless and blameless life in every particular. He was inclined to be a hard man in financial dealings, but no one ever accused him of being unjust. I have no knowledge that his morals were not perfect. If there were or had ever been entanglements in his life, as your questions would imply, I have never even heard about them. If somewhere a person existed for whom he wished to provide without mentioning the name in his letter, and without confiding the secret to any one but me, I never knew about it, and now have no knowledge which would lead me to suspect it. I have made this statement thus emphatically and clearly in order to assure you that I am keeping nothing back which would aid us in the development of this mystery."

"Thank you," said the detective, "I believe you."

"And now shall I go about the errand you just gave me?" asked Snowdon.

"If you please."

CHAPTER VIII.

MARSTON, THE FOOTMAN.

When the detective was alone in that room, after [illegible] seen that the servant for whose presence he had asked was at the designated station, he closed the communicating door between it and the house proper, and, returning to the chair at the flat-topped desk, he turned it about and seated himself facing the door open, safe.

Instead of continuing his investigation, he remained there in that attitude for more than half an hour, with his elbow on one arm of the chair, his chin resting in the hollow of his right hand and his eyes closed save only when at infrequent intervals he opened them to direct a questioning glance at one or another part of the room.

He was engaged then in turning over in his mind the entire circumstance with which he had become associated.

He was compelled to admit to himself that there were features about the case which were more than ordinarily puzzling; and when we say this, reference is made to the conditions of it with which he was familiar rather than to those which created the apparent mystery.

To be still more explicit, the attitude of Algernon Snowdon puzzled Nick Carter. The man himself also puzzled the detective greatly.

Outwardly he was a man beyond reproach or criticism, cold in his exterior conduct, yet precise in every detail of gentility, and careful almost to the point of excessive exactitude in every gesture and in every phase of his conduct.

Yet there was that about the man which the detective did not like.

Notwithstanding the apparently frank statement made by Algernon Snowdon just before he left the room, Nick Carter could not disabuse his own mind of the idea that the eldest son of John Snowdon was either deceiving him purposely or was repressing and concealing some sort of information.

It was these considerations that were passing through the mind of the detective while he remained in that chair with his chin upon his hand, and he was not thinking so much about the mysterious opening and looting of the safe as he was about the attitude of Algernon Snowdon.

But when half an hour had passed, and still as greatly puzzled as ever, the detective left his chair, approached the safe door, closed it and presently bringing two hassocks from different parts of the room, he placed them one upon another against the closed door of the safe in such a position that he could use them in conjunction with the stool already referred to for assuming a position he wished to occupy.

If you had been able to peer into the room at that moment you would see Nick Carter assume a reclining attitude against the hassocks and the stool, and finally place himself in a position so that the crown of his head very nearly touched the dial of the safe. In

that attitude he began again studying the domelike ceiling of the octagonal apartment.

The diamond-shaped panes of glass which formed at least two-thirds of the entire ceiling of the dome were now directly under his observation, and although he had previously studied them as described he now did so with even more intentness than before.

He did not count the minutes during which he reclined there in that attitude, and he really had no conception of the flight of time, so he did not realize that, when at last he sprang to his feet and kicked the hassocks back into their former places, another half-hour had passed.

He hurried to the connecting door, and found the tall footman in waiting where Snowdon had placed him.

"Come inside," he said to the man, and, pointing to one of the chairs, indicated that he was to sit there. "What is your name?" asked Nick.

"Marston," was the reply.

"You are not a young man, Marston?"

"No, sir, I am fifty-four years old."

"How long have you been in the employ of this family?"

"I served Mr. John Snowdon twenty-nine years up to the day of his death."

"So it's now thirty years since you came here with him, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What were your duties during the last year of Mr. John Snowdon's life?"

"Practically the same that they had always been."

"Well, what were they?"

"Generally, sir, I was always a footman; really I was valet and general body-servant to Mr. Snowdon. I always traveled with him wherever he went; if he took a journey down-town, I went with him; if he went to Europe, I accompanied him; during his life, and particularly for the last ten years of it, I was never very far away from him night or day."

"Were you in the habit of remaining in this room with him when he was here?"

"No, sir, I was never in this room with him save when he summoned me."

"How did he do that?"

"By pressing that button at the right of the chair of the desk."

"You never remained in the room with him, I suppose, only long enough to receive his orders and get out again?"

"No, sir."

"How about others who came here to see him? Were they admitted freely to this room?"

"Yes, sir; if the person was one whom he cared to receive."

"Was there during the last two or three years of John Snowdon's life any person who was admitted to this room freely?"

"There was never any one admitted to this room freely, sir."

"What persons were admitted?"

"Only those with whom he had business dealings or personal relations."

"I assume that there were not many such, Marston?"

"Very few, sir."

"Could you enumerate them?"

"Very readily."

"Who were they?"

"Mr. Mortimer Green, his lawyer; Mr. Clarence Snowdon, his half-brother; his two sons, when they were in this country; either of the two bankers with whom he had business but who came very infrequently, a broker whom he sometimes employed, the housekeeper, whom he often summoned through me, and myself."

"Do you mean to tell me that during the last two or three years of his life no other person than those you have named entered this room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Among them who was the most frequent caller?"

"Probably Mr. Clarence Snowdon."

"Do you recall the day when your master was found dead in this room?"

"Perfectly."

"Who found him?"

"I did."

"The time was about midday as I recall it."

"Yes, sir."

"Before that moment when had you last seen your master alive?"

"Shortly before midnight the preceding evening."

"But, Marston, if you acted as valet and body-servant to him and was never in the habit of being absent from his side for any length of time, how does it happen that on that particular occasion more than twelve hours elapsed after you saw him alive until you found him dead?"

"I have never forgiven myself for that circumstance, Mr. Carter," was the slow reply. "It happened in this manner: There was some country entertainment at the house the preceding evening; just some gentlemen

whom Mr. Snowdon was in the habit of inviting here once a year on the occasion of his birthday. The company for many years had been the same save when, as happened more frequently of late, one was missing because death had stepped in to interfere. On that particular Wednesday night there were nine of the old guests at the table. Mr. Clarence Snowdon and Mr. Mortimer Green were also present as what we would call extras. The party broke up at eleven o'clock. I personally saw each guest leave the house."

"Wait a moment, Marston. Was Clarence Snowdon one of the guests who left the house or did he stay here that night?"

"He remained here, sir, and occupied a room in the north wing."

"And Mr. Green?"

"He also remained in the house."

"Very well, go on with the story from the point where you personally saw the guests leaving the house."

"After they had gone Mr. Green and Mr. Clarence Snowdon both said good-night and went to their rooms. I then went with Mr. John Snowdon to his room and assisted him in retiring, as has been my custom for years."

"Well?"

"I turned off the lights, leaving one burning in an adjoining room, as was the habit, and I placed the insulated wire cord which has a push-button at the end of it over the chair beside his bed. That push-button communicated with a bell directly over my head where I sleep. It was there so that he could call me to him at any time during the night if he should require my services, but I must tell you now, Mr. Carter, that in all the years I served Mr. John Snowdon he never once made use of it during the hours when he was supposed to be sleeping."

"I suppose he never had occasion to do so."

"No, sir."

"He was always a well man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go on with your story."

"After leaving him as I have described to you, I went to my own room and retired. Mr. Carter, for reasons which I have never been able to describe, I was nearly [illegible] next day when I awakened."

"You [illegible] somehow drugged, Marston? Do you [illegible]?"

"In the only way by which I can explain it, Mr. Carter, and yet I fell as [illegible] from my usual sleep, and if I was really drugged there were no indications of the fact remaining when I awoke."

"Mr. Snowdon did not summon you."

"I think he must have rung the bell, sir, which I did not hear."

"Was he in the habit of ringing it in the morning?"

"No, sir; he never had occasion to do so. Mr. Snowdon's habits were entirely methodical. He arose from his bed at a certain hour and never deviated more than a minute or two from that time. It was my invariable habit to open his door and enter his room at precisely seven o'clock each morning of the year. I always found him awake and ready for me."

"But on that particular morning you did not do it."

"No, sir."

"When you did not appear at the usual time it was quite natural that he should have rung for you, don't you think?"

"Without doubt."

"And your sleep was so heavy that you did not hear the bell."

"I did not hear the bell; that is certain."

"Have you since tested the bell to see if it works?"

"Yes, sir; it works all right."

"And under ordinary circumstances it should have awakened you?"

"There can be no doubt of that."

"There is no doubt, then, in your own mind that you were indulging in an unnatural sleep?"

"None whatever."

"Mr. Snowdon rose and went about his morning occupations without you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know anything about the particulars of his rising that morning?"

"Only what James, the butler, told me."

"What did he tell you?"

"Merely that he was quite surprised to see Mr. Snowdon enter the breakfast-room without me, but the old gentleman made no comment to James, who served him, and went from the breakfast-room directly to this one, where about noon I found him as you know."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SNOWDON TRAGEDY.

"You don't know, then, that your master had sought by any unusual means to rouse you, do you, Marston?"

"No, sir; but I have no doubt that when I did not reply to the bell he must have gone to my room, and,

discovering me soundly asleep, as he supposed, he doubtless decided not to disturb me. Mr. Snowdon was always fond of me, and it would have been quite like him to do so. If I overslept, which seems improbable, from natural causes, I hold myself in a measure responsible for his death; if I was drugged—well, sir, I have asked myself over and over again why it was so, and if the person who did it was responsible for that death."

"When have you told about this circumstance, Marston?"

"It is generally known in the household that I overslept that morning, but I have requested the servants not to mention it, and beyond the persons who were in the house at the time I don't think the fact is known."

"In investigating the death of Mr. Snowdon, were you ever questioned about it?"

"There was really no investigation. The manner of Mr. Snowdon's death was so plainly apparent that no investigation was thought necessary."

"No one ever doubted that it was an accident?"

"I think not."

"Did you ever doubt it, Marston?"

"I have wondered about it, sir; I cannot say that I have actually doubted it."

The detective pointed toward the table and, stepping forward, indicated the position where the steel rod must have rested on its base, and he asked:

"Do you think it likely, Marston, that your master might have dropped asleep at this desk and so have bumped his own head on that steel rod?"

"I think it extremely unlikely, sir."

"Why?"

"Because in all the years I have known him, I never discovered him asleep or even drowsy in his chair."

"May he not have been suffering from the effects of a drug or of some sort of an anesthetic the same as you were?"

"I had not thought of that, Mr. Carter; but I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"If he had felt badly that morning he would have rested me; the fact that he did not do so suggests to me that he was entirely well and in full possession of his faculties."

"He was quite dead, of course, when you found him?"

"Yes, sir; and had been so a long time."

"Rigor mortis had set in?"

"The body was stone cold, sir."

"Marston, what do you know of the conduct that morning of the two guests who remained in the house overnight? I refer to Mr. Green and Mr. Clarence Snowdon."

"I know only this, sir: Mr. Green entered the breakfast-room, according to James, the butler, about nine o'clock, having just arisen. After eating his breakfast, he left the house, being told by James that Mr. Snowdon had gone to his private room. As for Mr. Clarence Snowdon, he had had his coffee and rolls served in his room at eleven o'clock that morning and was not yet dressed when I went to him to notify him of my terrible discovery."

"Did you notify Mr. Clarence Snowdon yourself, in person?"

"I did."

"And were the first to carry the information to him?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did he receive it?"

"He was naturally horrified."

"Did he accept the intelligence as a great shock?"

"He certainly did."

"Was there anything about his conduct at the time to suggest to you that he might have had previous knowledge of the fact?"

"Certainly not; I never thought of it."

"Tell me what he did when you informed him of the death of his half-brother."

"I tapped at his door, and, being bidden to enter, did so. He was standing half-dressed before a mirror in his room engaged in shaving himself, but as I opened the door he turned to face me. I remember that he was smiling as he did so, but the expression of my own face must have alarmed him, for he took one step toward me, exclaiming:

"'What is the matter, Marston? What is the matter?'

"'Mr. John Snowdon is dead, sir,' I told him, rather gasping out the information, for I was still so greatly overcome that I could hardly speak."

"What did Clarence Snowdon do then?"

"He started back against the chair that was near him, grasping the back of it for support, and he stared at me for a moment in speechless amazement, then he gasped out:

"'Dead, Marston! Did you say that John is dead? What do you mean! Are you crazy!' That is about all, sir. I told him the particulars then as far as I knew them."

"Tell me just what you did say to him and how he received it."

"I told him that I had overslept; that my master had risen, taken his breakfast and gone to his private room without me; that I had not awakened until nearly noon and then dressed as rapidly as I could and hastened to this room; that I found Mr. Snowdon bending forward in his chair in front of the desk with his head impaled upon the steel rod which had pierced his brain. I added that Mr. Snowdon had evidently been dead for hours."

"And how did he receive all that?"

"Like one stricken dumb with amazement. He listened to me to the end almost without moving, and when I had finished he laid aside his razor and without wiping the lather from his half-shaven face passed from the room into the corridor, descended the stairs and came here where we are now. I followed him and was only a few feet behind him when he entered the door over there."

"Well?"

"He came forward across the room to a position directly opposite the body of Mr. John Snowdon and gazed for a moment in paralyzed silence across the top of the desk at the corpse of his half-brother. Then, with a choking sob, he turned away and went out of the room without uttering a word."

"His conduct then did not impress you particularly in any manner at the time?"

"Only as that of a person who was terribly shocked."

"There was nothing about it to suggest to you that he had previous knowledge of the death of your master?"

"No, sir; I do not think he had."

"Where is James, the butler?"

"I do not know, Mr. Carter. He left the place here soon after Mr. Snowdon's death."

"And you do not know where he is employed now?"

"No, sir."

"Did you ever question him about the events of that morning inside the house."

"I do not know exactly what you mean."

"Did you ever discuss with him the circumstance?"

"Yes, we frequently talked it over together."

"Had no one been here to see your master that morning before you made your discovery?"

"I think not."

"Don't you know?"

"As far as I know, there had been no person here."

"Had any member of the household entered this room that morning?"

"My answer to that question would be the same."

"Had James himself entered this room, do you think, after your master came into it from the breakfast-room?"

"He had not."

"Had he or any one else seen Mr. John Snowdon that morning after he left the breakfast-room?"

"No, sir."

"Marston, what has been your personal attitude toward Clarence Snowdon?"

"My personal attitude? I have had none."

"How have you regarded him?"

"Please tell me just what you mean by that question, Mr. Carter."

"Personally do you like Mr. Clarence Snowdon?"

"Very much indeed."

"Have you known him quite well?"

"Rather better than any other member of the family save only Mr. John Snowdon himself."

"Better than Algernon or Peter, the two sons?"

"Very much better."

"What is your opinion, Marston, as to the general character of Peter Snowdon?"

Marston shifted uneasily from one foot to the other and back again before he replied, then he said:

"It is hardly within my province, Mr. Carter, to reply to such a question as that one. I am only a servant here, and servants are not supposed to express opinions of their betters, whether they have formed such opinions or not. But I appreciate the fact that the present situation is a serious one and that the questions you ask are, for reasons which I may not understand, important."

"Just so, Marston. I shall want your opinion of several other persons before I have finished."

"Well, sir, in regard to Mr. Clarence Snowdon, I should say that he was a man whom circumstances had treated rather unkindly. He and Mr. John Snowdon were sons of the same man, who chose almost to disinherit Mr. Clarence, for reasons best known to himself. I should say that Mr. Clarence has always been rather wild. No doubt his conduct has not always been exemplary, but my opinion of him was always that he showed his worst qualities on the surface and that inside he was by far the best of all the Snowdons save one."

"You mean your master?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your opinion of Algernon?"

"Mr. Algernon was the eldest son of my master."

"Nevertheless I want your opinion of him."

"I can give it in five words, Mr. Carter, and they will be somewhat prejudiced."

"What are they?"

"I have never liked him."

"Why?"

"If I tried, Mr. Carter, for the rest of my natural life I could not find an answer to that question."

"What about Peter?"

"I know next to nothing about Peter Snowdon; save when he was a boy at home, and before his character was formed, I have seen very little of him."

"But you do not like him; I can see that."

"No, sir."

"You have never liked him."

"No, sir."

"Nor Algernon, either?"

"No, sir."

"Was your dislike caused in any way by the attitude of either of them toward their father?"

"I think it was."

"Why so? and how?"

Marston shrugged his shoulders impatiently and hesitated for a moment before he replied; and then he said:

"You put me down to a very positive assertion, Mr. Carter; to one which I am scarcely competent to express. I have always been very fond of Mr. John Snowdon, who in many respects has been more like a father to me than a master. I have acted as valet, [illegible] and secretary to him for many years, and our relations therefore have been intimate and close. I have heard him express opinions which he would not have uttered before another person and which he had not perhaps intended that I should hear myself. My dislike for the two sons has doubtless arisen because of many expressions I have heard their father use in that manner, and because of my own criticism of their treatment of him; of leaving him so much alone in his old age when I have known that he desired their presence here. I hope, sir, that my remarks about them have not prejudiced you. I do not know why you are questioning me, and beyond the fact that your name is Carter, and I know you to be a detective, I have no idea what your business is at this house to-day. When Mr. Algernon Snowdon went out a little while ago, he told me who and what you were and that I was to hold myself in readiness to obey your orders."

The detective gazed at the man in surprise for a moment, and then he slowly asked this question:

"It is true, Marston, that you do not know what my business is in this house at this time?"

"Yes, sir; it is quite true," was the emphatic reply.

CHAPTER X.

NICK CARTER UNDERTAKES AN EXPERIMENT.

The talk which the detective had had with Marston put matters in rather a new light; at all events it did so in several respects; but now the detective was anxious to get rid of the man again, for a time, in order that he might have opportunity before the return of Algernon Snowdon with his brother and the lawyer, to attend to several matters which he had promised himself he would look into before they could have a chance to interrupt him.

The somewhat particular description given here of the dome-shaped roof of the old millionaire's private room will be remembered and must be borne in mind as this story works out its solution.

The detective knew that the safe could not have been opened without a knowledge of the combination on the part of the person who worked the lock; he knew also that the combination could have been discovered in only one manner. What was that?

Why, other eyes must have discovered the old man, at one time or another, when he was engaged in manipulating the dial of the lock.

It was an admitted fact—that is, was admitted by the detective to himself—that no person knew the combination save the millionaire. Even Algernon, with the letter in his possession, supposing that he already knew its contents at the time, could not have opened the lock without the aid of the other three who knew the remaining numbers, and by the same form of reasoning, no other one of the four, nor indeed any two of them, could have opened the lock without the assistance of the other.

As a matter of fact, the old man had arranged his plans so dexterously that the presence of all four of the men was required to supply the "open sesame" of the door of the safe.

All that went without saying.

Again, the known fact that John Snowdon never manipulated the combination lock on his safe door save when he was alone in the room, precluded the idea that any person should have been inside the room when he opened the safe, and so have discovered the combination.

But, nevertheless, other eyes must have seen him at work on the lock at some time—and it must have been entirely without a suspicion on the part of the millionaire that he was observed.

Now, how could such a thing have been accomplished?

Therein was the vital question.

Nick Carter believed that if he could supply an answer to that question he would have at hand a solution of the entire problem.

But could the answer be supplied?

"Put yourself in his place" has ever been a favorite maxim of Nick Carter's.

Whenever, as in the present instance, he found himself confronted by an almost impossible problem, it was his habit to put himself in the place of the other fellow, and to determine as nearly as it was possible to do it, how he would go to work himself to accomplish the certain results that had been performed.

So now he asked himself the following question:

"If I were the person whose desire it was to discover the combination of that safe, so jealously guarded, what plan could I conceive whereby I might surprise the secret out of the old man?"

The answer was obvious. It would be necessary to contrive a plan whereby the millionaire could be observed when he opened the safe.

"I might make an effort," said the detective to himself, "to remain in the room with him, or to sneak in upon him when he was so engaged; but plainly such a thing was impossible. In discovering that fact, I would have to adopt another plan, and I would at once arrive at the conclusion that it would not be done *unless I managed somehow to watch him from outside the room.*

"*Outside the room!* That is the idea. Now, there is only one place outside the room from which such an observation could have been taken, and *that would be from the roof!*

Again the detective studied the domelike roof of the [illegible] room. Then he opened the door into the passageway and called to Marston.

"Have you a ladder anywhere about the premises?" he asked the man.

"A ladder, sir?" was the half-astonished reply, and there was some hesitation in the questioning remark.

"Yes, Marston, that is what I said; a ladder."

"Yes, sir; there is one, at the stable."

"How long a ladder is it?"

"Really, sir, I don't know. I have not measured."

"Long enough, do you suppose, to reach from the ground to the roof of this dome?" asked the detective, pointing upward over his head.

"I should think [illegible] you, sir. I haven't a doubt of it."

"Then you would get it, Marston; and when you have done so, bring it to the west side of this octagonal building. I will meet you there and tell you what to do with it. Make haste, if you please. I wish to have done with this inquiry by the time your new master returns."

"Very good, sir."

The man went away; but as soon as he was gone the detective followed him outside the building and made his way around to that part of the spacious grounds which extended along the westward side of the octagonal wing.

There was shrubbery growing there in considerable profusion; some sort of domesticated laurel, Nick decided it was, and so thick and heavy in its growth as to prevent a person from walking through it. That is to say, a person would naturally avoid it, and by preference would pass around it on the outside, thus remaining at all times while passing the structure, at least fifteen feet away from the walls.

Now, to place a ladder firmly against the building, at the necessary incline, if one were to attempt to mount to the roof, the base of the ladder should touch the ground at a distance of eight or ten feet from the walls, and, having selected the spot where he wished to place the ladder, Nick stepped among the shrubbery to wait for the return of Marston.

It should be said that the position in which he wished to place the ladder was selected by the detective with reason. It was the result of the observation he had made inside the room at the time when he made use of the two hassocks, and stretched out on his back upon them in order the better to make a study of the glass roof.

He had had this idea before him at the time, and he had endeavored to select the position that such a person as he had in mind would have done.

Now, in stepping among the laurels to get into the position where he intended to await the arrival of the ladder, he noticed that the bushes had been disturbed at some time not very recent. Three of them had been bent downward, and while they had reassumed their former positions to a large extent, they had not gone entirely back to their normal condition. His keen sight exposed the fact to him that they *had* been disturbed.

Their alteration was not sufficient to have been noticed by him had he not been looking for just such a circumstance, but, being on the watch for it, he could not fail to notice the fact at once. It led immediately to further investigation.

Bending forward, he thrust the bushes aside and

peered at the ground between them. Then he uttered a sharp exclamation and immediately straightened again, whistling softly to himself as he did so, for it was an important discovery he had made—an important one indeed.

In the soft earth between the bushes, directly at the spot which he had selected as the most likely one for the prospective thief to have placed his ladder of observation, were the plain marks left by the two upright parts of the ladder when it had been leaned against the roof of the building.

The thief had utterly forgotten them, and so had left them there to be damaging evidence of his work later on, or he had believed that the thick bushes would so effectually hide them that there would never be danger of their discovery.

Doubtless the latter was the real reason for his not obliterating them: that, and the further argument that anything would happen to lead to a search for such things.

The detective had only a moment at the time in which to study them, for he had barely straightened his stout figure again and restored the bushes to their former condition, when Marston appeared around the house with the ladder in his grasp.

Nick watched the man as he approached, and, standing perfectly still where he was, motioned that the ladder be brought to him there.

"Stop where you are, Marston," he said. "Don't come any nearer. Pass the ladder to me."

But Marston continued to advance as if he had not heard, and in a moment more he would have stepped right up to the detective with the ladder in his grasp, had not the latter called out sharply to him to stop.

"Stop where you are, Marston!" he commanded. "Didn't you hear me? Pass the ladder to me from where you are. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's the idea. Now, sir." Nick took the ladder and leaned it against the building, but he took good care to set it in such a position that the base of it rested fully four feet farther back from the walls than were the impressions in the ground he had just discovered.

"Now, Marston," he directed, as soon as the ladder was in place, "

"Well, sir?"

"I want you to help me, are you not?"

"Certainly."

"Then mount the ladder and climb from it to the flat roof."

"But, sir, you have not told me what you wish me to do. You have not explained to me why you are here, as a detective, unless it is to investigate the death of my master; and I have always supposed that there was never any doubt as to the causes of that."

"I will explain all that to you later on, Marston. Just now, there isn't time. For the immediate present I want you to climb the ladder to the roof, to pass off it upon the roof, and when you have done that I will tell you what to do next."

"Very good, sir."

Marston stepped upon the ladder while the detective steadied it, and mounted slowly to the top; and then, as he stepped from it to the roof and slowly straightened himself before he turned to look down again upon the detective, Nick calmly took the ladder down, and thus left the fellow helpless, too high above the ground to attempt to jump the distance without the risk of breaking a leg.

For a moment it was plain that Marston was greatly startled. An expression of absolute fear swept across his features, and he gasped out:

"Why, sir, what does it mean? Why have you taken the ladder away?"

The detective laughed aloud.

"Don't be frightened, Marston," he said. "I have only removed the ladder for a few moments. I have done so to aid me in applying a test. Now you are all right, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir, only I would rather have the ladder——"

"All in good time, Marston. Turn about and look at the glass roof. Now tell me: Is it possible for you to climb up that roof any distance at all, by clinging to the framework?"

"Only a very little, sir; and I am afraid that I will slip and fall."

"Oh, I don't think so. Anyhow, I wish you to lay yourself out on the roof against that glass while I return to the house and observe you from the inside. Now, remember, sprawl upon the glass and against it, as much as possible, while I am absent. I will return in a moment and replace the ladder for you."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROOM OF MIRRORS.

Nick Carter's purpose in leaving Marston practically a prisoner on the roof of the private house was twofold: He wished to be sure to keep the man up there

until he had finished with the investigation he desired to make; but more than all he intended to obviate the possibility that the man might descend and discover in the earth near the ladder the prints made there by the thief when he made use of that means to find out the combination of the safe.

For now there was no longer any doubt in the mind of the detective as to how that secret combination had been discovered. The old millionaire had been spied upon through the roof.

The fact that it was made of ground glass made no difference in that respect. For it had been a comparatively easy matter to remove one of the diamond-shaped panes and to make the observation through the space so created.

But there was always the likelihood that the sharp eyes of the old financier would have discovered the shadow made by a human presence on his roof. It was that thought and the explanation of how it had been avoided which had determined the detective to experiment as he was doing now.

And he had no sooner entered the room beneath the dome than he was satisfied that no person could have remained upon that roof while the old man was in the room below it, without inviting certain discovery.

"A man shrewd enough to have laid all those plans and to have carried them out successfully, would easily have overcome that one difficulty," mused the detective, as he looked upward from the interior of the room to discover that Marston's form was plainly outlined against the sky. "I must look for further evidences of his genius before I decide upon the future moves I will make."

He remained inside the room only a moment; only long enough to determine what he went there to discover; then he returned at once to the ladder outside the house, and, having replaced it, called to Marston to descend.

The man was plainly offended. He resented the manner in which he had been treated, and as soon as he was on the ground, he demanded:

"Mr. Carter, will you tell me why you took the ladder away? It seemed to me——"

"Catch hold of it," said Nick, interrupting him. "Now carry it over yonder. That is the idea. Thank you. Don't be offended, Marston. It was my desire to observe something from the inside, and I did not want you to removal until I was ready to have you do so."

"I hope, sir, that you found what you were searching for."

"I think I did, Marston."

"You have not told me yet, what it is, Mr. Carter."

During this small play of conversation the two had carried the ladder away from the building, and now Nick sent Marston to return it to the stable; and while the man was absent the detective began a further investigation.

If you could have watched him then you would have been amazed by his methods.

He first stood at some distance from the building and slowly counted the diamond-shaped panes of glass from the top, down, along one of the lines. Then he produced a pencil and paper from one of his pockets and made some figures upon it. Next he backed away to a distance from the walls of the building, until he was half-concealed among the grove of trees at that side of the house; and here he made more figures on the back of the envelope.

He had just completed his mathematical problem to his satisfaction when he saw Marston returning, and he met the man half-way.

"Come into the private office with me, Marston," he said, in a tone that was intended to be cordial; and a moment later, when they were again in the room near the safe, he added: "You have indicated to me that you know nothing of my purpose in being here. Has nothing been said to you by any person in reference to the robbery that was committed in this house?"

"Robbery, sir? When? Where? How?"

"The safe was robbed, Marston," replied the detective, seating himself in the chair of the former owner of the place. "I don't know exactly when it was done, but I am rapidly discovering how it was accomplished."

But Marston seemed only to have sensed the first part of the detective's statement. His manner was plainly one of great surprise as he exclaimed:

"The safe has been robbed?"

"Yes," replied the detective.

"But how could such a thing have been possible, sir? Mr. John Snowdon never revealed to any person the secret of the combination of his safe. I have often heard him make that positive statement. He boasted that even after his death it would require the presence of four different persons to open it."

"All of which is quite correct, Marston."

"Then how could the safe have been robbed? It was not blown open. It would show it, if such a thing had been done." And as if to emphasize the positiveness of his statement, he turned toward the safe

as soon as a gesture of outward incredulity. Nick watching him narrowly.

"There was only one method by which the safe could have been opened without blowing it open," he said. "You know what that is, as well as I do."

"The combination?"

"Certainly."

"But—— I know, positively, that Mr. Snowdon kept the figures of the combination an absolute secret, locked in his own breast."

"And yet, Marston, there were times when he was compelled to make use of that combination himself, weren't there?"

"To be sure."

"And if he was resolved not to tell the secret of it to any other person, the only method by which that secret could be discovered, would be to observe the old man when he was in the actual act of opening the safe; don't you agree with me?"

"Yes, sir; but ——"

"Why do you hesitate? What were you about to say?"

"I was about to say Mr. Snowdon was very particular about that. He never opened the safe only when he was entirely alone in the room."

"Possibly."

"Then how could another person have observed him, sir?"

The detective pointed to the glass roof over their heads.

"I don't understand," said Marston.

"The old man might have been observed from that roof, Marston. Did you not understand that it was to determine the possibility of such a thing that I sent you up there on the ladder?"

"No, sir. I did not then know what you were investigating; unless it was something connected with Mr. Snowdon's death. It did not occur to me that the safe had been robbed."

"Marston, take that seat yonder. Thank you. Now, I wish to ask you some questions, to all of which I should like concise replies."

"Yes, sir."

"And if any of the questions strike you as being irrelevant, please remember that it is not your province to inquire about them. All that I require of you is to answer the questions I shall ask."

"Yes, sir."

"You have stated to me that you acted in the capacity of secretary to the old man, as well as fulfilling other duties. That is true, isn't it?"

"It is."

"In your capacity of secretary, you were more or less familiar with his private affairs, were you not?"

"Yes."

"Did you at any time know what that safe contained?"

"No, sir."

"But you did know that it held a large amount of money and other valuables?"

"Yes; at least I supposed so."

"Now, Marston, I will make an abrupt change in the apparent subject."

"Yes, sir."

"The interior of this room has interested me greatly. In making a thorough examination of it with my eyes, I have observed several things which I wish to have explained to me. It strikes me that you are the most likely one to supply that explanation."

"I shall be only too happy to do so, sir, if possible."

"Very well. I have noticed among other things that these walls are not only decorated with paintings and engravings, but that there is a curious arrangement of mirrors between many of the pictures. Can you explain to me why Mr. Snowdon was so fond of mirrors?"

"It was a sort of hobby of his, sir," was the reply, delivered somewhat nervously, the detective observed, with a smile.

"Precisely. Now, from the position in which you are seated, you are facing the safe. Just to the right of the safe you will observe one of the mirrors; over there, do you see it?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you will look into it you will see there the face of a second mirror, located at another of the planes of the octant of the room. Do you see that?"

"I see what you mean; yes, sir."

"Well, what is the last thing you see in that mirror at which you are now looking, from the position in which you are sitting—which, by the way, is precisely the same as if you were seated on the stool directly in front of the safe, at the dial. What do you see?"

"Why! It is—yes; it is the door through the passageway!"

"Precisely. If you were on your knees in front of the safe, working at the dial, or if you occupied the stool which the old man used for that purpose, you could still see the door which gives entrance to this room, could you not?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well; we now observe one of the reasons for

the old man's fondness of mirrors. He did not wish to be surprised by any person who might appear suddenly at the door while he was engaged in opening the safe, and so he provided that system of mirrors to render such a surprise impossible. Have you quite grasped that idea?" The detective was smiling now.

"Yes, sir."

"Change seats with me; so. Now your back is toward the safe. Pull your chair closer to the desk. That is it. Now the door is before you; the safe is behind you. However, if you will glance into that mirror to your right, you will see through the reflection of other mirrors upon which that one acts, the safe door. Do you see it?"

"Yes."

"You knew that these mirrors were here, did you not, Marston?"

"Certainly. I——"

"And you thoroughly understood what they were for, didn't you?"

"Really, sir, I—— No, sir, I did not. It is all a surprise to me. A great surprise."

"In that case, Marston, I have still greater surprises in store for you."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"There are still other mirrors here, Marston; and there are other uses for them, too." Do you mean to tell me that you do not understand what they were for?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE SECRET OF THE PRIVATE ROOM.

Marston did not reply. He was plainly ill at ease, all of which the detective observed with interest, although he did not appear to do so.

"Marston," he said, "if you did but know it, you are rendering me greatly in what I am about. I hope you will continue to see your [illegible]."

"Yes, sir; certainly. By all means."

"Over yonder," said Nick, pointing with his finger directly across the room to a place opposite him, "there is rather a remarkable system of stout cords. You know where the cords are without looking, do you not?"

"Yes; certainly."

"[illegible] what they are there for?"

"Yes, sir." The reply came quickly this time and with decision. "They are used for additional ventilation."

"Ostensibly they are so, of course. But were searching know that they had another purpose?"

"No, sir."

"What, Marston? Are you quite sure of that answer?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long a time have you known cords to be arranged in this room as those are now arranged?"

"Ever since I can remember, Mr. Carter."

"And you have never investigated them beyond the apparent use that was made of them?"

"No, sir."

The detective crossed the room and manipulated one of the cords, thus raising one of the diamond-shaped panes of glass in the roof. Returning to his seat, he began adjusting an oval mirror that rested on a pedestal on the top of the desk, and, having arranged it to his satisfaction, he said:

"Now, Marston, look into that oval mirror and tell me what you see."

Marston had suddenly become frightfully pale. His eyes were staring and his lips were dry; but nevertheless there seemed to be a sort of fascination about the oval mirror which he could not resist, and slowly his eyes turned upon it.

But the instant they rested there, he started to his feet with a loud cry. His right hand flew toward one of his hip pockets, and in another [illegible] would have drawn a weapon, and without doubt have made use of it, only that Nick Carter was too quick for him.

That the detective had foreseen this outcome of his experiment, was at once evident, for he was in every way prepared for what followed. Marston's act, in attempting to draw a weapon, he anticipated by starting forward from his chair and half-throwing himself across the top of the table-desk; and at the same time he seized the arm that was extended toward the weapon, and jerked it to one side. Then he squeezed it and twisted it, and with the result that the revolver that might otherwise have been used against the detective, was dropped to the floor; and so the two men stood, staring at each other across the table, Nick with an expression of sternness in his eyes; Marston with a face of utter despair—of abject terror.

"Marston," said Nick coolly, but retaining his hold upon the man so that he could not hope to escape, "you are a sorry specimen of a criminal, for you have no courage. You are crafty and cunning, but you have no force. I suspected you of this thing almost as soon [illegible] ; certainly

as soon as I saw you and talked with you; and when you so glibly told me of the relations that had existed between you and your master, I was positive."

He paused for an instant, during which he forced Marston around the end of the table to another chair, and quickly snapped handcuffs upon him; then, after a warning to him that he was not to attempt to leave the chair, the detective continued:

"You made another mistake, Marston. You should not have spoken quite so highly of the man who was your confederate in this affair; and you should not have attempted to prejudice me against Algernon Snowdon. Such methods almost always have a boomerang effect, Marston."

He paused, for there came a summons at the door in the passageway, and stepping to it, Nick admitted to the room three men: Algernon and Peter Snowdon, and the lawyer, Mortimer Green.

As they came into the room they gazed in surprise at the huddled figure of Marston, handcuffed to the arm of the chair in which he was seated.

"You hardly expected that I would find and capture the criminal so soon, did you?" said the detective, with a smile. "But it was all very simple, indeed, once I was here on the premises. I will explain it to you presently. Mr. Green, I hope you are able to tell me where Mr. Clarence Snowdon is to be found?"

"I can answer that question," exclaimed Peter Snowdon, before the lawyer could reply. "He is at a private sanitarium in this city, where he is being treated for his besetting sin. You can guess what that is likely to be, Mr. Carter."

"Yes. Do you know that he can be found there?"

"I do. I have seen him to-day. There is no danger of his leaving it, either."

"Very good," said the detective. "Now, if you will be patient with me for a moment, I will explain all this case to you."

Without waiting for a reply, the detective placed three chairs in a line, behind the one occupied by Marston, and motioned to the new arrivals to occupy them. After they had done so, he assumed for himself a standing position directly in front of the prisoner, so that while Marston could not see what effect the story the detective was about to tell would have upon the [illegible] directly under the observation of Nick Carter, who had determined to wring a full and complete confession from him.

"I will tell the story as concisely as possible," the detective began, with his eyes directed straight at Marston, but really addressing the others. "Marston, if I am incorrect in any particular detail, it will be your place to correct me."

He waited a moment for a reply, but as none came, continued:

"When Algernon Snowdon brought me into this room I spent much of the time while I was here, studying it. After I had sent him away, I continued that study; and I saw many things here that interested me.

"The most important of them all seemed to me to be the peculiar arrangement of the mirrors. There are twelve arranged about the room, as you will notice. They are of different sizes and shapes, but that is an unimportant detail and was indulged in merely so that they would not attract undue attention if any one who happened to enter the room chanced to notice them. I wish you all to follow me closely, if you please."

The listeners nodded their assent, and the detective continued:

"Mr. John Snowdon was a man who liked to know everything that was going on. The mirrors were arranged so that he could do so with the least possible trouble. He could sit at his desk and see into the open safe behind him without turning his head. He could sit at the safe and see the door through the passage, and, indeed, any part of the room behind him, without turning his head. But he could do more than that: He could remain seated in his chair in front of the desk and see down the driveway, or the pathway from the house to the gate, without rising from his position, and simply by changing the position of that oval mirror that always stood on the desk near to his hand.

"The discovery of those cords yonder, developed that fact to me. I manipulated the cords and found that they worked certain of the diamond-shaped panes of glass in the roof over this room. They were there ostensibly for ventilation, but as I quickly discovered, were really for the purpose I have named. Do you understand?"

"Thoroughly so," replied Algernon Snowdon. "The use of mirrors was always a hobby with my father. I might have told you as much had I thought of it."

It was Nick's turn to nod, and he continued:

"Well, when I had developed the case that far, I decided that if a person could see out of this room, through the roof, by the aid of mirrors, another person could so arrange matters as to see *into* the room from the outside, by the same means. It was simple, if only I could determine how it was accomplished.

"I had already been led to suspect Marston, for the reason that some one who had ready and almost constant access to this room was a necessary part of the plot; but the plot, in order to be well carried out to a culmination, *needed two persons.*

"After you had gone from here, Mr. Snowdon, I sent Marston to find a ladder, knowing already that there should be one. I made him climb to the top of the glass roof and took the ladder down, thus making him a prisoner there, and frightening him. I did it in order to test my theory more thoroughly. He did not stand the test, and I knew that he was guilty; but I still needed proof of it—which was supplied when I surprised him into a confession, or what amounted to a confession, after we reentered this room.

"Gentlemen, you may not realize it, but those cords against the walls, communicate with several of the diamond-shaped panes of glass in the roof over this room, and each one of them so used is a mirror. It is not noticeable from here, but closer inspection proves it. In order to make use of those mirrors from the outside, and in order to impart to it sufficient power to reflect the dial of the safe, two things were necessary: One was that the operator should climb to the glass dome to take careful measurements, and after that, when the dial of the safe was to be observed, it was necessary not only that the required pane of glass should be raised from the inside, but also that it should be approached and properly adjusted by human hands after it was so raised. After that, a man in the grove to the west of the house, who had a small telescope in his possession, could easily read the figures on the dial of the safe in this room.

"But still other things were necessary. That oval mirror on the desk had to be placed in a required position, and there was only one man who could do that—Marston. Also it was necessary that some one should signal to the operator outside the house, when the safe was about to be opened. Marston again.

"Now, gentlemen, I have almost finished. The robbers had no intention of waiting until the old man died before they made their haul. They wanted the money at once—and so that night of John Snowdon's birthday-party, was selected. It was doubtless supposed that he would sleep soundly after the festivities, but instead of that, he evidently could not sleep. At all events he came down-stairs during the small hours of the morning, and he entered this room. In doing so, he surprised the thieves at work; but they hid away from him, and so he seated himself in his chair at the desk without discovering their presence in the room.

"Gentlemen, it was then that he was killed. It became necessary that the robbers should escape. We will say that the safe had already been looted, but they had to get out of this room. *One of them sprang forward and seized the old man, intending to choke him; but instead of doing that, the old man's head was thrust forcibly forward, and so was impaled upon the steel rod.*" The detective paused for an instant, and then, pointing an accusing finger at the prisoner in the chair, he shouted:

"And there sits the man who murdered John Snowdon, his benefactor!"

"It is a lie! A lie, I tell you!" cried Marston, attempting to start to his feet, but sinking back again, helplessly. "Clarence Snowdon did it. All the rest you have said is true, but it was Clarence Snowdon who killed his brother; not I."

Nick Carter turned away with a smile.

"You observe, gentlemen, the force of moral effect," he said. "I had absolutely no proof whatever, of my statements; and nearly all of the important part of those statements was the result of guesswork. Marston had keys to this room; outside there are imprints made by the ladder; beyond that, under the trees, are footprints where Clarence Snowdon stood when he took his observation. Here are the mirrors and the cords. Those are all the facts that I possessed. The rest was guesswork. Clarence Snowdon was in this house that night. Marston pretended that he was drugged. The safe must have been robbed that night, and Mr. Snowdon must have entered this room while the thieves were here. That is the guesswork part of it—but you are all witnesses to the confession."

It only remains to be said that much of the money, and the securities, were later found in the possession of Clarence Snowdon. The sealed envelope, contained in the drawer in the safe was still unopened, although also in his possession; but Algernon secured it, and put it away unopened, saying that it was his father's private business. One more thing only need be said, and that was derived from a later and more complete confession on the part of Marston. He did return to the safe, after it was visited by the four who opened it together, sent to do so by Clarence Snowdon who feared that something incriminating might have been forgotten; but Marston was in haste at that time, and did the job badly.

THE END.

The next number (638) will contain "A Mental Mystery; or, Nick Carter on a Difficult Trail."

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THE STORY THE TRAPPER TOLD.

By EDWARD S. ELLIS.

On a cold gloomy night, in an unknown, several years ago, three trappers were seated around their camp-fire at the base of the Rocky Mountains. It was at that particular season of the year just succeeding the regular winter storms, when the atmosphere is keen, sharp, clear, and bracing. They were down within a lonely gorge, where the light of their fire was securely screened from the prying eye of any wandering Indian, and where no roaming wind passed harmlessly over their heads. They had eaten their supper of buffalo humps and were now smoking their pipes and resting. They were a hardy set, those trappers, with their bronzed and shaggy faces, crossed by cicatrized wounds and illuminated by a sort of jovial recklessness acquired from their long familiarity with danger. Each possessed a spare, unmounted steam, with bridle in reserve form, able strength, wonderful endurance, and a partner as gay. These last, George Allnut, was a peculiarity in himself. He had unusually long neck a bulging nose, and, when walking, possessed a curious, slouching gait, going sideways, as though he was making his way by main force through the air. He was a grizzly-looking customer, and about to have other special attains, stammered badly in his speech.

Presently next in order was the trapper known as Dick Drake, a lank, cadaverous individual, with preposessing features, and an exhaustless fund of good humor. His appearance gave indication that the wants of his body received but little attention from him, and he had indeed, frequently gone days at a time without eating a particle of food. The present party he was the leading man instinctively as their natural leader and commander.

The third and last was much smaller than the others, and was known as "Charley Stanto"; or, from his diminutive stature, he was more commonly called the "Count." When walking, his neck protruded forward, and his appearance was as awkward and uncouth as could well be imagined. His nose was a decided turn-up, with an ill-nurtured point, his cherry, his upper jaw jutted over the under, and his smile was such that instead of ornamenting it disfigured his face. Different in temperaments and character, the three, from long companionship, were alike in their love for their perilous calling, their disregard of personal danger, and their determined persistence in the pursuit of any object.

A splendid night this," remarked "Count," as he snuggled the coal in his fingers, and dexterously dancing it in his palm, dropped it in the bowl of his pipe. "What a pity we couldn't have such weather all the time?"

"What's the use?" cried Drake. "We'd soon get so tired of it that a regular storm of thunder, snow, rain, and sleet would be a relief. I pities them people in the settlements, Waugh."

"Wish-k-a-t do you p-p-p-ity them for?" stammered Allnut, winking his eyes and nodding his head, as though it would shake his arm off.

They suffers so," replied Drake feelingly. "They misses all this enjoyment, this here luxury of camping out, this getting chawed up by bars, and to get hair raised by Injins. They misses all that, and I pities them!"

The trapper was in earnest, and heaved a great sigh out of commiseration for his deluded brethren of the East, who failed to participate in the blessings enumerated.

I pities them," he added, "and yet they doesn't deserve pity nor I they knowed exactly how things was in these parts they would come even then.

"Say, how'd you like to be a bear?" remarked Allnut.

What is the reason they was t?" demanded Drake.

Didn't see the sun I s'pose.

Waugh! I knows that. Hain't you ever had a bar Allnut?

"I don't blame the bar that 'jected to embracing you cause why, he couldn't stand it, but yers as has been hugged by them same critters.'

"I'ers bear about it?" asked "Count."

"It ain't much, not worth the tellin'. Waugh! I'm sad and I spoke of it."

Now, if a grizzly bear or the trapper's rifle had ventured to make the remark as well I have reason to anger of one knew better than himself that the story he was about to relate was the most thrilling episode of his life; but it was his manner of depreciating what he was about to say.

It it ain't worth relatin', keep your mean trap shut," said "Count," well knowing that this would expedite the narration.

I don't much, but want it I'll tell you I'll. It's now about five years sin' me and Dick Vansant started for trapper's grounds up in Oregon. Beaver skins, and other critters had been mighty scarce for two or three reasons, and so we concluded to strike out for a new spot. Thinking as how we would make more and go where we was likely to be disturbed by any of the boys, we took the mountainous part of the country right square among the Blackfeet, that was tearin' and rarin' every critter that wore a wig skin, which, being the case Allnut, you won't have been in any danger at all, not the least.

"Wasn't, Dick and me had glorious luck as we got onto a creek where the beaver had never been meddled with and where they had growed so thick some of 'em proposed attackin' us and drivin' us out of the country. Them beavers

are very sagacia'ted, as they say in the settlements, and have got long heads. They had a great dispute over the matter, but come to the conclusion at last that, as we hadn't attacked them, they wouldn't tackle us, decidin' that we had got to strike the fust blow.

"Waal, I reckon we did strike the fust blow, the second, and I shouldn't wonder at all if we struck a few more. Leastways, we soon had such a pile of peltries that Dick proposed that we should start for hum. Being so far off, however, and the Timber Dog not being so much nigher, we made up our minds to dispose of 'em at one of these places. So we started, our mules loaded down till they was invisible under their peltries, looking like big turkeys crawlin' around the country.

"We kept a sharp lookout for Blackfeet, and had hard work to steer clear of 'em. I don't b'l'eve we was ever out of sight of their camp-fires an hour at a time, while we daren't touch off a toothpick for fear of drawin' 'em down on us. The farther we got the more of the thieves 'peared to be around, till at last we daren't sneeze without holdin' a beaver-skin over our noses to deaden the sound. Dick sometimes rode on a spare mule that we had, and one day he thought this critter looked as though he was going to cough. Knowin' that it would never do to allow that, he jumped off, knocked him in the head, and rolled him over some rocks, and Dick felt proud that he had saved us so easy. The other mules, seein' what had took place, kept their mouths shut, so that we wa'n't troubled in that way at all.

"One day we reached a high mountain which Dick wanted to pass over, while I wanted to go round, as I was sure it was full of Blackfeet. We argued the question a long while, till to end the matter I give in, and we commenced ascendin' it.

"We went very keerful up the mountain, and queerly enough didn't once see sight of a redskin; but on the very top, when we was goin' along very still, all at once—I say, Allmat, just fix up that fire a little, will you."

"Yes; g-go on," replied the hunter, doing as he was requested.

"Waal, as I's sayin', we didn't see nothin' till we got to the very top, which seemed very queer to both of us, for we knowed the varmint was an all-fired sight thicker than your ancestors are, Allmat, when you show yourself in the States. See that ain't here or there. We was walkin' along very quiet like, when whiz! bang! come twenty shots, and Dick's animile keeled over and went under without so much as sayin' 'scuse me,' or 'by your leave,' and before we was fairly through and through, and all the peltries gone. Things looked so squally about then, and my topknot got so tossing that it kinder way crept from my head. More doin' something rashly I took an observation, which was rather hurried. If I seed one redskin, I seed thirty jumpin' over the rocks, yellin' and whoopin' like Sarpints let loose, and every one had them in my ha'r. Sendin' a shot among 'em, I then-wed my rifle and run, the whole pack tearin' after me like mad. Jumpin' along from rock to rock, they all the time grew closer on me, I at last got down in a valley, where the ground was level, and then I done some tall travelin'. I'd ve got off safe enough, if, just as I had got a nice start in the valley, those leds's——. I say, Giant, just hand me a light for my pipe, will you?"

"There it is, and I just think with the whole pack!"

"And so I had got a nice start, when the first I see I was just a-leaping a——"

"Scuse me, Nick."

"Eh. Just speak, Allmat."

"An elephant?"

"No, sir. I just couldn't once get low down enough, really to say an elephant. They had been on ancient and had started out to hunt me. The first whom I saw coming was an awesome sight I couldn't part 'em, while the Injins was nearly on me behind me. Them grizzlies had their backs up, too; their mouths were open and slobbering with foam, and their eyes was as red as the end of Giant's nose there. I looked ahead and seed it was no use to think of slippin' by them—they was too cunnin' to let me do that. I looked behind and seed it was just as bad with the Injins. So what do you s'pose I done?"

"Sh-hot 'em," replied Allmat.

"Couldn't do that, as my gun was throwed away."

"Run by them?" ventured "Giant."

"Couldn't be did, I tell you."

"S'pose you went under."

"No, sir; didn't do no such thing, though matters looked enough like it just then."

"What in thunder did you do, then?"

"Waal, sir, I took another look and concluded I'd try the b'ars afore the Injins. They was standin' close together just then, and I run in atween 'em. They reared up on their hind legs as they seed me comin', and I catched each of my arms under their fore legs and I had 'em fast. They squirmed and cried desperate hard to git loose, but it wa'n't no use. As I held 'em they hatted their heads together till they was mad as fury, by which time the Injins had come up. Catchin' the grizzlies in my arms, I throwed 'em right in among the redskins, and in shorter time than it has took me to tell it, they had chawed up every one of 'em, and, when I left, was picking their teeth with their tomahawks!"

NAUTICAL EXPRESSIONS.

Windward signifies toward the wind, and leeward the opposite direction, or away from it. Starboard and port signify right and left, and apply when a person stands with the back toward the stern of the boat or vessel, that to the right being the starboard side, and that to the left the port side. The terms were originally starboard and larboard, but as the ends of these words are the same, confusion and accidents were the result, and larboard was therefore changed to port. On the beam or abeam signifies abreast the middle of the vessel; thus, in passing a point of land, we say, such-and-such point is on our weather or lee beam—for instance, the *Volunteer* was right on our weather beam or lee beam at noon, etc., according as the wind may have been at that time, when we were exactly abreast of this headland. The two most important terms used in sailing are "luff" and "keep away." The first signifies the bringing of the boat's head toward the direction from which the wind proceeds; the second that of making the boat's head fall off from this direction. As the helmsman in a boat should always sit to windward, or with his back to the wind, he will cause the boat to luff by pushing the tiller from him, and to keep away by pulling it toward him. No beginner in boat-sailing should ever sit to leeward of the helm, for he will not be able to command the tiller in such a position, and when a flaw of wind strikes the boat, he is quite as likely to push the tiller from him as to pull it toward him, in which case the boat, instead of coming up into the wind and relieving herself by shaking the sails, will be kept away, and feel the whole strength of the flaw. In this manner many boats have been upset. When a boat is passed [illegible] on the right side to a person looking forward, she is on the starboard tack, as it is called, and has the right of way over any other vessel or boat which has the port tack. The vessel on the port tack is, by law, compelled to give place to her either by going to leeward, and if she does not keep as good a course, she is condemned for any damage that may result.

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